

PADMINI: AN INDIAN ROMANCE

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BY

T. RAMAKRISHNA

Author of

"Life in an Indian Village," "Tales of Ind," etc.

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY

THE RIGHT HON. JAMES BRYCE, D.C.L.



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TO THE MEMORY

OF

MY DEAR FATHER

T. VARADA PILLAI

BORN 17TH MAY 1821 ; DIED 8TH AUGUST 1899

INTRODUCTION

MR T. RAMAKRISHNA, whose acquaintance I made in Madras some years ago, asks me to write a few lines of preface to a romance of bygone Indian days which he is publishing. My knowledge of the annals of Southern India of the period to which the romance relates—the period in which the great Empire of Vijianagar fell—is far too slender to entitle me to express an opinion as to the manner in which the features of Indian life during that period are depicted; and, indeed, the materials accessible to a European for studying it are very scanty. But I willingly take this opportunity of expressing the interest which students of history feel in the rise and growth of an Indo-English literature—that is to say, of a literature written by natives of India, using the English tongue as a means of conveying their thoughts not only to Europeans but also to those dwellers in India who use an Indian vernacular different from their own. The development of such a literature will be watched from Europe with curiosity and sympathy: and if the themes treated, whether they be drawn from Indian legend or describe the Indian life of to-day in some one of its many and diverse forms, are handled with a force and skill sufficient to fix the attention of English readers,

the result may be to give to Englishmen a better comprehension of the character and present tendencies of the Indian mind. It is not only the material progress of India that deserves to be followed and noted by us in England; it is also the current of ideas, and the influence which the West is exerting upon the ancient beliefs and usages of the East. Nothing is more to be desired in the interests both of India and of England than that the various peoples of India and the people of England should have better means of trying to understand one another. The growth of a native Indian literature may furnish such a means: so we in England have every reason for welcoming Indian writers who, addressing us in our own language, seek to convey to us, as does Mr Ramakrishna, the spirit of Indian life and the sentiments which its legends inspire.

JAMES BRYCE.

PADMINI: AN INDIAN ROMANCE

CHAPTER I

A PROPHECY

ON the 23rd of January 1565, on the plains of Talikota, that great battle was fought between the Hindus and the Muhammadans, which inflicted a crushing blow on the powerful Vijianagar kingdom, and the closing years of the sixteenth century witnessed the gradual disruption of that great Hindu Empire, whose sway extended as far south as Ceylon, that is, over nearly a third of the continent of India. This Empire contributed in no small measure to whatever is attractive and charming in the present-day lives of the South Indian peoples, whatever is worthy and enduring in their literatures, noble and chivalrous in their characters and feelings, and heart-stirring and soul-inspiring in their religions. The Lord of this empire, tradition tells, had once enchained,

though for a short time, the Emperor of Delhi, and the gradual effacement of its power paved the way more easily for the planting in India of British rule. During this memorable period of its history Southern India witnessed many a deed of valour in the cause of truth and justice ; and in the actions of the brave and the chivalrous was seen exemplified humanity in its higher and diviner forms, but alas ! poets there were none to immortalise those deeds in enduring verse, and to make those spots, where the noblest of those human achievements were enacted, hallowed ground. Unhappy the nation that hath no history ; and happy the nation that can hear the ballads, commemorating the adventures of her warriors, sung with fervour ; and happy the country that can point with pride on the pages of history to patriots who wept for their country's wrongs, boldly stood against the oppressor and the tyrant, and shed their blood for their countrymen. But such is not our lot, and our heroes passed away with their deeds unsung and unrecorded. At the same time, during those unhappy days, wholesale plunderings of villages and burning of

cultivated fields were of everyday occurrence ; innocent children were torn from their mothers, and the honour of women in large towns, unable to withstand even small marauding parties, was sacrificed to the uncontrolled passions of the merciless hordes, that continually overran and harassed the country. Men's lives were treated as of no account by depraved Humanity that happened to be in power, and found no check to the continuance of its lawless course, but often met with success, and even gained affluence and regal authority in the great scramble for power that followed the general confusion. So utterly disconcerted was society in those times that the picture of the poet was no doubt drawn from life ;

“ . . . and in those troublous times,
’Twas easier for the brave to kingdoms found,
Rear palaces and rulers strong become,
Than for the toiling peasants, from sown fields,
To reap their crops and safely bear them home.”

There were then more murders, more outrages on the purity of women, and more acts of injustice on helpless men perpetrated, than during any other period ; but history, unfortun-

ately, records them not for public execration by future generations. Reader! read and find if a ghastlier story could be found in the whole literature of the world.

The Hindu ruler, who ran away south after the great battle of Talikota, to keep up a semblance of the empire's former glory and power, was the paramount Lord of Southern India, more in name than in reality, and often he and, after him, his successors had to change their royal residences from one place to another, unable to withstand the power of the new states that arose asserting their independence, till at last they settled in Chandragiri, about seventy miles west of Madras. At the beginning of the seventeenth century the king who ruled the country was an amiable, tender-hearted person, full of all private virtues; at the same time, he was wanting in that manly courage, that energy and that hardihood, which characterised his forefathers. All power was centred in his minister Saluva, who was both able and unscrupulous. His master's good nature gave the minister opportunities of gradual self-aggrandisement. His restless ambition moved

him to find ways and means to usurp the throne and secure it to himself and his descendants.

Accordingly he resolved to boldly throw off the mask and proceed to put into effect his long-nurtured plan. On the day appointed he ordered the palace gates to be closed, and, with a few of his trusted men, entered the inner apartments. Soon the king's men informed their royal master of the coming danger, and advised him either to lead them against the treacherous foe or take to flight. The good-hearted ruler was reluctant to believe that his trusted minister was capable of such nefarious action, but was suddenly taken by surprise when he saw what he had heard of burst upon him in reality and when he heard the traitor directing his armed soldiers to enchain their king and master. Seeing that the matter had already assumed serious proportions, and finding it was useless to resist, the terror-struck king tamely submitted himself, his wife and children being entombed in a dark dungeon. All this was the work of a minute; and though there were loud complaints and even

hostile demonstrations on the part of the country over the action of the chief minister, these were put down by his ability and firm hand; and, shortly afterwards, he proclaimed himself king. Having gone thus far, the usurper dared not put his master to death, and thus remove the only obstacle that still existed to the consummation of his great ambition, for this would rouse the ire of the nobles and the petty chiefs, who each had armies of their own, and would raise a conflagration throughout the country, which it would be hard to quench. But alas! there happened an incident which brought about the ghastly catastrophe unparalleled in the annals of Southern India.

One day a young minstrel of barely twenty summers, one of the clan which was the repository of all the chivalry and the romance of the land, appeared before this same usurper. The youth was one of the wandering bards who went about the country, and who were welcome in every household. They not only recited the songs composed by their fathers, describing the deeds of heroism and valour worth preserving, but were able themselves

to court the muse. They were a specially gifted class, on whom, it was said, God's special grace descended for work of this kind. Their persons were considered sacred, and no one dared to touch a hair of them. The poetry—the love songs and the martial ballads of these men—were listened to with rapt attention, and for a warrior or a great ruler to have his deeds commemorated by one of these was considered the greatest honour which he could hope to attain. It was the sure passport to fame and the way to gain the approbation, and even the love, of the most beautiful daughters of the land; and immortality was obtained through these only and through their poetry. When once honoured in their verse, the praises of the hero were sure to be sung in the court of every prince or noble, nay, in every village of the land. Thus it was that these bards were very influential and eagerly sought after by kings and independent chiefs. At the same time, they were the most dreaded, for they had the power to write that poetry of a peculiar form, which, when sung, was sure to bring ruin on the head of him against

whom the poetical anathema was pronounced ; and the whole country was sure to rise against the constituted authority of him who was set down as a tyrant by one of these.

One such, with more ardour than prudence, appeared before the usurper of Chandragiri. He was burning with rage when he found his country in the hands of one who was not her rightful king ; and when he went forth with his new harp to recite the poetry of his fathers, as well as his own, his youthful ambition told him that there was no better theme worthy of his muse, no nobler task fit to be undertaken, for the first time after his tuition, than the sacred one of appearing before the country's tyrant, softening his savage breast, and procuring the enchained ruler's release. Noble thought ! Noble purpose ! He was a bold singer. His mien was firm, and showed that he was careless of the royal frown. His eyes shone with great lustre, and his whole frame showed that, even in the oppressor's presence, he was sure of the strength of his cause and resolved to win or die. The harp, which he took for the first time, was made of the finest wood ; the

gourd was the best that grew on his parental roof, and the chords were the finest. His fingers played upon them so freely and ran about their different parts so unconcernedly that it showed he was the master of his instrument. And when the fingers ran quickly upon the strings, and when the voice came from his full youthful throat, there came a melody and a sweetness as from the innermost depths of music. Nor was the subject of his song one of no importance: it was a sacred theme, a pleading for the liberty of a wise and a virtuous king. The bard stood leaning upon the pillar of the capacious palace hall, whereon was worked the figure of a female form, of exquisite workmanship, beautiful in every proportion, and most lovely to behold. It was a thing of beauty. It was as if life were breathed into it. It was the work of a practised hand, who toiled at it for months, and, when finished, the Chandragiri king gave the workman villages free of rent in perpetuity. The plastered form looked as if it were chiselled out of the finest marble of pure whiteness, and successive kings often stood gazing at it for hours; and the story

even runs that that same figure pacified the kings in their frowning moments, and many a criminal and many an unfortunate subject were saved by its proximity to the throne whereon those kings sat and administered justice; and leaning on the pillar, whereon this figure stood, the young minstrel sang of the fleeting nature of this life, of the fleeting nature of wealth and power and all earthly glory. He sang of love and truth that lived for ever; of all else that died away. He sang of God and humanity, of faith and hope; and in the midst of the full fervour of the bard's song, when the tyrant was carried away by the ecstasy of the music, he forgot for the moment the cares of the world, the restless ambition of his life, which his head was full of at all hours of the day, scheming and planning ways and means as to how best to secure the throne, which he had usurped, to his sons and sons' sons, as long as the sun and the moon and the stars should last. Thus far the youthful bard touched the better part of his nature. Thus, for a minute at least, this fiend in human shape became a human being with divinity lurking within. Thus sang the poet:

“What is the ancient gilded throne, thou sittest on?
What is the jewelled crown, that glitters on thy head?
What is the silver and the gold upon that throne?
What is the diamond and the ruby on that crown?

What are these royal palaces and these spacious halls?
These hoary towers, that to heaven proudly rise,
These gardens of the fragrant jasmine and the rose,
These groves of sweetest pomegranates and luscious grapes?

And beauty's daughters moving here like heav'nly
forms,
Oh! what are they, if they move not man's savage breast?
What is the melody, the music of the bard,
If, from the tyrant's purpose, they now turn him not?

And thyself, what art thou, whose word to-day is law,
Obeyed e'en in the utmost corners of the land?
Alas! a lump of lifeless clay but yesterday,
And soon upon the morrow that same lump of clay.

'Tis Truth and Love alone abideth in the world;
And of that Truth and Love set free thy king and mine,
And live in song and saying as the fav'rite theme,
Of future bards, of warriors bold, and maidens fair.”

But the divine fervour of the hour vanished
for ever from the usurper, and the good part
of his nature which the bard had touched
was not strong enough to withstand the
lower passions that took hold of him when
the youth pleaded for the imprisoned monarch's
liberty. His eyes darted fire, and those near
trembled for the fate of the young minstrel,

who, nothing daunted, grew more bold, and sang :

“’Tis thy accursed body sitting on the throne ;
It is a tyrant’s scheming head that wears the crown ;
And in these palaces and these halls a savage roams,
And trembling maidens strive through fear to please a fiend.”

And straightway when these words were sung, like the wounded tiger springing upon his victim with greater fury, the enraged ruler sprang suddenly upon the defiant minstrel and, drawing from his side his javelin, thrust it with all his might, saying, “darest thou thus to insult me ?” and, instead of the heavenly music from that poor young bard, there gushed forth blood in profusion. His body lay prostrate, and from that withering frame there were heard coming these prophetic words :

“Thy dart hath pierced my heart, but hearken to the
darts,
From this my bleeding tongue, that shall consume thy race,
Of whom none shall this throne of high renown defile,
None to point, where thy body crumbled to the dust.”

And when these last words were spoken, the dying bard, making one final effort, dashed his faithful harp on that fair plastered form that smiled over him, and straightway fell that

figure crumbling down to pieces. The chords of the harp were broke, and, shrivelling and curling, they rolled on the ground sending their death-rattle; and simultaneously, too, were heard the last death-sounds of the young minstrel. Mute and cold lay the corpse of him in whom lived the noblest sentiments which moved him thus to sacrifice his life for his king and for freedom; hushed for ever was the sweet voice, that sang of Truth and Love; and hushed for ever the melody of his companion harp, that lay broken and shattered to pieces; and vanished for ever the sweet smile and the lovable grace that beamed on that fair face that, till now, softened the hearts of the mighty occupants of the throne opposite in their frowning moments, and vanished to make the tyrant a worse sinner.

CHAPTER II

A GHASTLY STORY

MAN's life and nature have been likened by a Hindu poet to the soil of our earth. The soil is insipid in taste; there is no brilliancy of colour; nothing beautiful or attractive in the sight of it—nothing therein to rouse the passions or the sentiments of man; and to the sense of smell, what is there lovable or agreeable, or at least, what is there striking in it? But out of it cometh the sweet perfume of the jasmine: out of the unsightly clay sprouteth the stately lotus, the fragrant and the beautiful coloured flower,

“ . . . beloved by poets of all times,
Whose beauties lovers ever love to tell,
And liken oft to women's thousand charms.”

The sweet orange comes from out the earth's womb, and oh, how much man loves to taste its juice and enjoy its flavour; and are there not also fruits born of it every summer, so bitter that man's face contracts with horror

at the very sight of them; flowers uncouth in appearance and so detestable to the smell that a mere breath inhaled by man throws him unconscious to the ground? Such the soil. No doubt, like the poison in the serpent's egg, the sweetness of the orange, the stately beauty and the fragrance of the lotus, are in the seed, but it is the soil that makes the unseen in the germ a reality. So man. Tap the fine part of his nature and he is an angel. His life becomes lovely and divine, shedding around a charm and sweetness not unlike the loveliness associated with fine orchards or the spicy groves that breathe their fragrance for miles around. Rouse man's lower passions and he becomes a fiend in human shape. Good and bad flourish in the soil of his nature. It was the time, the place, and the actions of men around, exerted on him, that made man the saintly soul beloved of humanity or the savage brute remembered with execration. There were good men and bad in the world's history. The worst character in history might have been the saintliest of men, if, perhaps, he had lived in a different age and in a different place and with different contemporary men

whose actions might have induced his better nature and developed it gradually the other way. The surroundings, therefore, and the influences exerted on man's nature are the seeds planted to make his life noble or ignoble, to take root and gradually shape the course of his life for good or for evil; and, oftentimes, one single action planted upon great natures, and one single thought, sown on those fertile soils, have wrought the salvation of man and shaped his destiny for ever.

And with Saluva, the minister who had usurped his king's throne, of nature excitable, of feelings keen and passionate, and energies splendid, the world of his ambition was small, the philosophy of his life was circumscribed and narrow. The country he lived in had ideals of human ambition, which worked upon his nature and led to results which will be recorded hereafter. He lived in an age when the whole power was centred in the king, who was deemed to be the specially chosen one of God sent here to govern his creatures. It was quite foreign to the genius of the Hindu nation to consider the minister as apart from, and independent of, the king; to consider him as

capable of wielding more power than the king and doing greater good to mankind. Saluva, having reached the height of his ambition, was jealous of his position as king, and he considered it as degrading to descend from his high pedestal to glory in acts, which the great in spirit among kings went about doing as the humblest of men—acts of sympathy and love for humanity, which made them greater than kings and emperors. His bold actions, instead, perhaps, of making him repent and lashing his conscience to lead a better life in the future, only tended to produce the opposite effect by the actions of the people, who resented his bold venture. There were open expressions of discontent, his power as king was questioned on all sides, and this preyed upon his sensitive nature. It was like the wound left upon a diseased and unhealthy constitution—hard to heal; and when the noble-souled but indiscreet minstrel pointed out to him the injustice of his deed it was like the ripping open of the ever-fresh wound. When that unknown bard fell, pronouncing his last curse, Saluva retired to his private apartments, meditating upon the event. That night he had no sleep.

A thousand thoughts came crowding upon him. Hitherto the discontent of the people, owing to the sudden imprisonment of the king, was like the smouldering fire. By his vigilance and watchfulness, by his great capacity, and by the resources he always commanded, the smouldering heap found no vent. The disturbing elements, whenever they tried to force themselves out, were kept in awe. The opposing forces were kept in check. But now the action of the bard was inexplicable. Here, at least, there was one outlet. Perhaps it was the forerunner of other pent-up forces ready to burst out openly. Moreover, it foreboded evil to his house that the fair plastered form, so divinely graceful that it carried those who gazed upon its lovely features to their sacred temples, where dwelt their gods, at whose feet they fell and worshipped, should in one instant be shattered to pieces. Perhaps it meant the fall of his house and the shattering of all his hopes. How to avert it? The only impediment to his ambition should be removed. The deposed monarch and every one of his progeny should become extinct. He must be prepared for all eventualities. Now was the time to

strike the iron. This was the resolve formed long ago, and this was the fittest opportunity to put it to action. Such were the reflections he indulged in on that night. Early the next morning he called his friend and relative Obalu, the man who was ready to obey his command, and confided to him his resolve.

To that faithful adherent he entrusted the same dagger that had cut short the career of that unhappy singer, and said: "This day shall be the last for the king and all his progeny entombed in the darkest dungeon of our palace. Finish the deed with this dagger; take a few of thy trusted followers and dispose of their bodies in secret; and fail not to bring to me that great ruby shining on the king's finger, that emblem of Vijianagar royalty, which the great sage on the banks of the Pampa gave to the founder of that illustrious house centuries ago. Bring me that priceless gem, worth a kingdom, for it is sure to bring to its happy possessor every earthly glory and renown, and, what is more, ensure this throne to me and to my offspring."

When Obalu reached the prison chamber, Venkataroya—for that was the king's name

—was then just risen from his bed. It was a bed of straw, abject and mean, fitter for beasts of burden to rest their wearied limbs upon than even for an imprisoned monarch to sleep on. Six months had elapsed since his deposition. During that short period his face had become deadly pale, his body bent, and his hair prematurely grey. The poor king had been a stranger to God's light and air, and, during these months of confinement, he had become ten or even twenty years older both in appearance and physical strength. It was a sight of abject misery, that melted even the heart of Obalu, who had known the king in the days of his power and glory.

The messenger went and sat by the king, and said : “ I am commanded by my master to acquaint you of the sad fate of a young minstrel, who boldly intruded into the audience chamber and pleaded for your liberty. Oh ! it was but yesterday, and these eyes of mine witnessed his strange mien. His defiant attitude and the curses and anathemas he hurled on my master's head enraged him, and the price he paid for his youthful folly was his own life.”

“ I pity the youth, who, moved by noble

sentiment, sacrificed his life for me. May his soul rest in peace," said the immured prince, and, when these few words were said, a tear, a solitary tear, stole from his eye. That tear was shed, not because he felt the sadness of his condition, for he was too high-souled for such manifestations of human weakness, but because he thought of the fate of an unselfish life, cut short in the prime of youth, which, if it had lived, would have done some lasting good to the country.

The messenger broke the silence by saying : " You say it is noble sentiment that moved the raw, inexperienced youth to sacrifice his life. I say it is sickly sentiment that led him to fight for a hopeless cause ; and, wishing to clutch at a bare nothing, he wronged himself ; his sorrowing, aged parents who, in their declining days, depended on him for solace and comfort ; and, what is worse, he wronged you, for my master says that but for you his blood would not have been spilt. If you had not lived there would have been no bard to plead, no cause, no pleader. Hence his mandate to me to remove the cause, for it is a source of grave danger to the country, to

misdirected minds such as his swayed by sickly sentiments.”

“Say not so,” said the king, his pity now turned to anger. “Lives such as the bard’s have been the shining lights in the world, showing the way to those in the dark to rise by. Sentiment is responsible for all that is good in this world. It is God’s sacred gift to sweeten man’s life on earth. Remove it, and what would the world be? It would be the playground for the sensualist, the fertile field for vice and sin to flourish and succeed. For the sake of sentiment thrones and kingdoms were given up. It was considered by the great and the wise as a higher crown to wear than rich diadems. For the sake of sentiment, women, clothed with naught but chastity, scorned comforts and riches and spurned the hands of mighty emperors. Have we not read these things in our ancient books? Divorce sentiment, then divorce also from this world truth and love, sympathy and humanity, justice and self-denial. Then this world is a huge wilderness of brutes warring upon one another for the sake of satisfying physical lust and sensual passions, and this

will be the one goal to which man's whole thought and energy will be directed. If sentimentality be no concern of man, and if his whole energy be directed to reducing everything to gold and silver, then this world is not worth living in at all. If, at this juncture, owing to the ferment the country is in, disturbances and consequent loss of human lives are to ensue, swayed by that same sentiment, I am ready to sacrifice my life for the peace of my country and for the safety of my people. The king lives but for his subjects, and if their well-being can be secured and my country's peace assured, I am ready to die a thousand deaths. I court instant death, and, if you are to do the deed, do it at once. Better, far, death than this miserable life in this dungeon: death for my country's good, and I bless the hand come to do it."

Obalu, who heard these noble sentiments from the king—immured as he was—who observed his attitude, that displayed no agitation, and his complete self-denial, said, with deep emotion: "Sire! my heart faints and my hand falters to do the deed. I am

commanded to do it by this same dagger that put an end to a promising career. The blood of the bard is still fresh on it. I am to do it, and more: to kill every one of thy progeny and secretly dispose of the dead bodies under this very soil. Oh, Sire! save me from this terrible work and from this sin."

"To which the king replied: "Here, again, you will call it sickly sentiment if I take this thrice-blessed dagger, that pierced the noble youth, and court death through it. Death by this dagger, to me, is better than by any other." So saying, the king took the instrument and went to the inner apartments, telling Obalu to wait a while.

When thus Venkataroya went unmoved to the inner apartments to tell his wife and children to prepare for the coming doom, the washerman, told off to wash the clothes of the royal family, was just then busy collecting them into a bundle. A sudden thought flashed across the king's mind, and, addressing the washerman, he said: "You are the only one of my subjects present here during the closing hours of our earthly existence. Do one last service for your fallen king, and you

will live for ever in our country's annals. I know you love me though you fear the tyrant who usurped my throne."

The washerman replied: "I am willing to obey the royal mandate. It is an act of filial loyalty, and it is a sacred duty which I am enjoined to perform. Vouchsafe, my lord, to thy humble servant the service allotted to me."

"Here is my second son Srirangaroya," whispered the king, "secrete him in this bundle of clothes, take him safely out of the palace, and have him in your cottage to-day, and at nightfall send him away to seek his safety in distant lands."

The washerman consenting, the king hastily took a palm leaf and wrote thereon the following with his ivory-handled style: "This is my second son Srirangaroya, and the ruby ring on his person is the great ruby of our household. When the time comes, let no one doubt the one nor the other. This is written with my own hand. Venkataroya." Then, taking the ruby ring which never was separated from his finger from the time he ascended the throne of his fathers,

and, rolling both it and the palm leaf in a silk kerchief, securely tied it to the young prince's arm, and addressed him thus: "Never untie this, my son. Let it always remain on thy arm as thy father put it. It is his last gift to thee. Remain with the washerman to - day. At night take thy journey and run away to a distant place for safety, and even if, as a shepherd tending a poor villager's flock, you could live your days, be satisfied with your lot; and if god Venkatèsa, dwelling on yonder hill wills it, you may yet seek the throne of thy fathers and add lustre to our ancient house. But, in seeking it, shed not even a single drop of blood. If it should happen that invincible armies range under your banner, and that success will assuredly be yours, lead them not against the usurper, wade not through blood to the throne—prefer to live the life of an obscure villager. Alas! our mother earth, this land of ours, is soaked already with the blood of innocent lives, and, in a few short moments, the blood of thy kindred is going to be spilt. But if, without the striking of a single blow, without the loss

of a single life, you could, at any future time, gain your throne, then regain it by all means. Then, if a question should arise, then, and only then, shall you untie the bundle which your father secured to your arm at this hour. Trust in God. Adieu, my son !”

So saying, he turned towards the great temple of Tirupaty on the hill-top, and invoked the blessings of his household divinity, dwelling there, upon his son, the only one of his ancient house; now to be suddenly cast upon the world, friendless and penniless. The boy was then safely rolled with the clothes, and the washerman immediately vanished with his precious burden. The youth, who was twelve years of age, even at that time of his age realised the gravity of the situation, and so comported himself that the faithful washerman felt his burden light and his task easy. After passing the seven gates of the palace and the vigilant watchmen stationed there, he succeeded in safely reaching his humble cottage home, on the outskirts of the royal town of Chandragiri. But, in that hour—that memorable hour of that year of the seventeenth century—darker scenes were enacted in the

dark dungeons of the palace of that historical town, while, at that same hour, there breathed in a bundle of dirty clothes a human being destined to do a deed, peaceful in its nature, and the greatest of that memorable century. After the washerman vanished with the bundle the king called his eldest son, who, being eighteen, was an independent member of the family, and told him the story of the bard and his untimely end, of Saluva's determination to exterminate every one of them, and the consequent purpose, for which his messenger had come to their prison that morning, and the prince, nothing daunted, consented to put himself and his young wife to death. Then the king called his wife, to whom he communicated their sad plight, and she, with the implicit obedience characteristic of a Hindu wife, willingly bent her head, which, with one stroke, was severed from her tender body. Then the king put his last son, aged five, to death, and, afterwards, when he approached the cradle of his female child, aged three, he found her sleeping, and, when he raised his sword, lo! he found the child smiling and speaking in her sleep. She was

holding communion with the heavenly spirits, and his hand could not be raised to do the deed. So, calling Obalu, the unhappy monarch said that his hand could not be brought to rise against a sleeping child, holding converse with angels, and requested him to finish the deed himself. Then, learning that his eldest son had performed the part of the work assigned to him with a courage and coolness more remarkable than his own, he took the dagger sent by Saluva, and, planting it on the ground and baring his breast, ran his body through, and breathed his last in a few minutes. His eldest son did the same to himself with another dagger, in imitation of his father. Then Obalu despatched the little child sleeping in the cradle, and searched all the apartments for the ruby ring, but found none. Thus perished in a few short moments all the members of the great Vijianagar House, except one, who alone remained of all that historic royal house, and who, in his day, sowed a small seed upon a fertile soil, which grew in time and expanded into a stately tree.

CHAPTER. III

PADMINI—THE POOR VILLAGE MAIDEN

It is difficult, it is said, to construct a science of human character, for, as the South Indian proverb says: The ways of the world are various; nay, they are curious too. No two men are alike in appearance. How could they be such in character? And man, how inconsistent his character at one period of his life with what it is at another! History has shown to us the knave, painted in the blackest of colours, committing a deed that extracts our admiration and makes us, in the feeling and the sensation of the hour, to accord him a place among the worthy mortals of the world; and we read of the purest and the best of men deliberately doing an act at which we stand aghast, and read, perhaps with a smile, the historian failing with all his ingenuity to furnish a satisfactory explanation for the conduct of his hero. Man is thus inconsistent with himself. And so there have

been facts, the outcome of human motives and human feelings, that are difficult of understanding, and man's ingenuity gets worsted in finding explanations for those peculiar phenomena. Exactly so with our Saluva. We have seen before how ambitious he was, how in the furtherance of that ambition he committed deeds the blackest on history's page. He was the unjust usurper, the cruel tyrant, and the heartless regicide. Could depraved humanity go further? How, then, could my readers expect him to be capable of refined feelings or honourable conduct? But, reader! observe what follows.

It was when Saluva's agents and emissaries went about the country constantly, to recruit capable men for his army, which he always took care to have at its full strength on account of the disturbed condition of the country, that one very intelligent Brahmin agent, with an ambition as great as his own, but tending in another direction—namely, to settle down comfortably in life, by a single stroke of successful business, brought about in a short time, by which he hoped to secure for himself honours and rewards from his master—

came, in the course of his wanderings, across a most beautiful damsel in an obscure village. Like the diamond, whose lustre is hidden in a dark mine, this beauty of the village grew in an obscure, thinly populated, and scarcely visited village. Her matchless beauty, simple habits of life, which consisted in attending to the household duties of her parents—the poorest in that poor village—and the artless innocence of the face that knew not its own beauty and, therefore, was unconscious of it—or, if conscious, thought that it was the common lot of all on earth—struck deep into the Brahmin's heart, and the idea at once flashed across his mind that Padmini, for that was the girl's name, was a prize fit and worthy to be secured for the ruler of the country, and not be merged in the usual work-a-day life of the village, by being mated to a simple villager, working from morn to eve for a pot of porridge. A fitting opportunity for the realisation of his ambitious dreams having thus presented itself, the Brahmin hastened to Chandragiri and narrated to his master what he had seen, and described in detail the thousand and one charms of the country girl.

This description, given in the language of truth, aroused Saluva's cupidity, and he wished to marry the girl. He was the lord paramount, he was the king and ruler, and a word from him, a nod of his head, would have the desired effect. No; Saluva wished to bind this frail mortal to him by pure love alone. He desired to conquer her by whatever was sweet and graceful in his temper and estimable in his character, and thus win her in that manly and honourable manner. Accordingly he despatched the Brahmin messenger to the parents of the girl, with costly presents that a queen might envy, to acquaint them with his love for their daughter. He sent the girl a collar of gold, set with the finest rubies, a girdle of emeralds of spotless colour, and bracelets of diamonds of the purest water. The parents were only too delighted at this sudden and unexpected offer. They consented to give their daughter in marriage, but the high-souled girl would have none of it; and when the priceless collar, worth a mint of money, was about to be thrown on her neck she drew aside and fell at the feet of her parents, and said, with tears streaming

down from her lustrous, beautiful eyes :
“ Dear father ! dear mother ! this poor roof is more sweet to me than the palace of Chandragiri ; this humble life of tending your flock is more attractive than that of the queen of the noble house of Krishna Deva Raya. A queen I may be, but how can I separate myself from my loving parents, from these simple scenes of my childhood, so imbedded in me that they form part of my nature. I would rather be the poor village maiden I am, always living with my parents and among these pleasant associations of my girlhood, than be separated from them to become the highest woman of the land.” Thus power and influence, greatness and richness, and all earthly blessings had no charms for this poor Indian girl, to whom, like the rest of her class, her dear village was a little world in itself, the outer world being a sealed book to her, and all her knowledge of nature and experience of human life never extending beyond the horizon of that little world of hers.

The messenger went and narrated to the anxious suitor the whole history of the inter-

view with Padmini's parents as truly as it was enacted. It is human nature to attach a value to, and even view as precious, what at first sight was considered easy of acquisition but afterwards, contrary to all expectation, becomes difficult of acquiring. Saluva had never dreamt of such a result. He deemed it was an act of condescension on his part to propose his marriage with the girl. Contrary to all expectations things had happened otherwise, and this sudden unexpected result only tended to make him imagine that Padmini was possessed of more beauty than she really was endowed with, of excellences and virtues higher and greater than those reported to him by the eye-witness. Of nature impulsive and sensitive, and, therefore, capable of strong feelings and deep impressions, he thought of her and her only, and roused himself to such a state of mind regarding her that she became the most precious being on earth. What before was deemed a thing to be had for the mere asking was now turned into a priceless treasure that not all his proud position as ruler of the land, his vast riches and great power, could purchase. Saluva, who before

was in the enviable condition of dispensing a favour to one who was worse than he, who waited for long years at the outermost gate of his palace to have a mark of royal grace by so much as a nod of his head or a smile of the face, now considered himself a suppliant imploring for a favour.

The Brahmin's account of the girl had roused his love for her. Her beauty and charms, described in detail to him, were indelibly fixed in his mind. He resolved to win her, but by means only fair and honourable. A suitable appointment was soon found for her poor father in the palace household, and it was with tears that the village girl parted from the scenes of her girlhood, and, casting one last lingering look upon her village so dear to her, followed her parents to new scenes, new modes of life, and new associations quite different from those she was hitherto accustomed to. When she reached Chandragiri and saw that royal town in the days of its glory—its broad streets; innumerable houses with storeys one rising above the other; elephants with howdahs, silk hangings, and silver jewels; horses richly

caparisoned prancing along those streets ; gaily-dressed servants of the royal household moving to and fro, reminding the new visitor every moment of the greatness and the power of the ruler ; when the simple girl saw nobles going in carriages drawn by huge bulls with silk trappings, and their servants with silver maces going in advance, warning the passers of their master's coming ; and when that guileless maiden saw also dancing girls, each wearing jewels that might buy her whole village, and accompanied by maid-servants so great in number that she thought that each one of them was rich enough to employ all the inmates of her village as her household servants ; and, lastly, when she saw, seated on their dromedaries, men of strange races, from strange realms, wearing strange dresses, and speaking strange dialects, bartering for wares in high terraced bazaars, wares which she had not seen or even heard of—the fact for the first time struck her of the great differences in the modes of human life. What she noticed as most striking in the new sphere she was in was the labour and thought and energy bestowed by the people of a thickly-populated

town, gathered together as in a beehive, and vieing with one another, on the satisfying of human luxuries. The one motive that actuated the inmates of her village to work was for the acquiring of the bare necessities of life. In place of grains of the roughest type, for which the simple peasants toiled hard from morn to eve; in place of dried stems of these grain-yielding plants which sufficed to feed their lean, hungry cattle; in place of vegetables of the most ordinary kind that grew upon the roofs of their humble dwellings; in place of the juicy fruits of the palm that fell every morning in abundance—which nobody owned or claimed; in place of flowers of every-day use that grew wild; in place of vessels of mud which were the only ones used; in place of the rough cotton fabric woven by the village weaver for their daily use and bought, perhaps, in exchange for the grain that grew on their fields, and for valueless trinkets of gold and silver that only a few, very few, of the village wore—Padmini found here, for the first time in her life, rice and wheat of the finest quality and cereals of many sorts, and almonds and sweet nuts spread out in abundance in the

bazaars for sale ; spices for giving flavour to food ; fat, well-fed bullocks with clothes of silk yoked to gaudy vehicles ; well-laid and neatly-cultivated orchards with pomegranates and grapes and oranges ; the jasmine, the rose, and fragrant shrubs of many kinds in well-laid fields, reared with the utmost care ; vessels of silver in ordinary use ; damasks and silks and laced clothes worn by ten out of every twenty ; and jewels of pearls and rubies and diamonds adorning in profusion the persons of women, so much so that the woman without any jewel was found to be the exception in Chandragiri : when the village girl noticed such sharp differences she, no doubt, said to herself : “ How could the lord of this magnificent town—where wealth and plenty reign ; where want is unknown ; where it is all joy and happiness ; where music is heard at all hours of the day ; where painting and sculpture enchant the eyes ; where the number is legion of women that are beautiful—how could the lord of such a town, the powerful ruler of the kingdom of Krishna Deva Raya, set his heart upon a poor village girl, with naught to recommend her but her extreme poverty, naught

to attract but her artless innocence, and naught to make her an object of affection but her simplicity ? ”

When the small village party reached the place in the palace allotted to it, and when Saluva happened for the first time to meet Padmini, oh ! what was his surprise to find the girl to be even beyond his expectation. Health, beauty, grace, simplicity, and innocence all to perfection. Health not manufactured by highly-wrought medicines and courses which wealth alone can command ; beauty not got by the foreign aid of ornaments ; grace not acquired by special training ; and simplicity and innocence, wherein was naturalness, not of that order where the best art is to conceal art itself. Thus Padmini was the fairest in every way among the fair maidens of Chandragiri—made fair only by all that wealth, education, and art could combine to make—a moon among the stars and, as her name indicates, a lotus among the flowers :

“ . . . the fairest flower in Ind,
A flower beloved by poets of all time,
Whose beauties lovers ever love to tell,
And liken oft to woman’s thousand charms.

This flower, the stately lotus of our Ind,
Its petals closes to the moon at eve,
And all its beauties hides through silent night,
But with the rising of the morning sun
Opens and swells, its beauty full displays
And sweetest fragrance breathes, when fiercest beat
The rays . . .”

Even so Padmini. Like the stately lotus sprouting out of the unsightly, uninteresting clay, she was born in an uninteresting, obscure village, and like the servant of the royal household that comes to a distant place to pluck the flower and take it to adorn the palace chambers, she was taken to the palace of Chandragiri to shine there as a woman among women, and like that same flower breathing sweetest fragrance when fiercest beat the sun's rays, the beauties of her character shone brightest by the rays of royal favour fiercely beating on her at all hours of the day, and her rugged virtue was shown the most when fiercely she was attacked with requests and importunities for marrying her.

Thus the tyrant and the savage was a suppliant for the hand of a village girl, whom, if he wished, he could easily have for his bride in that same manner as that by which in one

short moment, when he so willed it, he effaced from existence his own king and all appertaining to him. Such, then, reader! is human character—unexplainable and ununderstandable: such is man—a being made up of strange contradictions.

CHAPTER IV

THE PRINCESS AMBIGA

THE Hindu ideal of womanhood is at once graceful and elevating. Conceived thousands of years ago by the sages of old, on the banks of rivers and in mountain caves, it is the one thing that has been handed down to us pure and unsullied. Its charm and beauty lies in its stern severity, and time or the altered circumstances of the country have in no wise modified it. While many nations of the earth have swept over India leaving naught behind but desolation, like those strange and sudden visitations of nature that change even courses of rivers and bury cities under ground and provinces under seas ; while their laws and customs have affected our own ; while dynasties and creeds have passed over her like meteors in the sky ; while all else have died away and left a perfect change : her daughters are the same now as they were thousands of years ago, when Savitri braved difficulties, with a

tenacity and purpose that draw tears from us, to save her husband from the jaws of death ; when Nalayini tended her husband, to make his life sail smoother, amidst the trials and soreness of an incurable and a sickening disease ; when Seetha, through devotion to her husband and anxiety to see him fulfil a filial duty, willingly undertook the perils and privations of a forest life ; when Chandramithi fearlessly bowed her neck to her husband's sword to save him from a difficult situation when he was fighting truth's battle ; and when that woman, on the banks of the Vygai, seeing with grief some of her king's army running home from the field of battle, and unable to ascertain the fate of her own son, who went to fight also for his king, hastened to that field of battle, with knife in hand, determined to cut away her own breast if her son too, for fear of her at home, had run away to some other place of safety, assured, in that case, it was not the blood of her departed husband running through his veins that made him a coward, but her own milk, which he had sucked from that breast in childhood, but was at last overjoyed to find him, lying slain on the field gored

with wounds, and her brave husband's name preserved from an eternal stain. Blessed be that ideal, and may it ever be the one for our women to follow.

In that ideal a higher place is assigned to the woman than to the man. The same principle we see in modern times in the view we take of great men, whom we set up as models to follow and admire. An unpardonable defect in a man of the ordinary type is treated as of no avail, while, perhaps, a pardonable weakness in a leader of society is magnified into a great vice. Although a vulgar man feels he is not able to attain a high standard of morality, he is nevertheless very fastidious in exacting it of the great men of his country, and to them he willingly bows. He venerates them. So we have done with the woman. We expect from her a greater degree of human excellence. A woman with character pure and unsullied is a more lovable being than a man with similar traits of character in him. Men may err. Woman, she must never. She must be perfection. All the beauty, attractiveness, charm, and grace in human character are centred in the

woman. There is divinity breathing through it all. There is a halo of sacredness ever surrounding her person; and to this high and hard ideal set up our women, in all ages, have willingly bowed. Many a time has this stern ideal been put to practical test during the course of our long and chequered history, and we this day look with admiration on those practical trials borne with noble endurance, and swell with pride at seeing our women of to-day animated with the same spirit as of old; and our national characteristics, sometimes mentioned in praise of us and at other times pointed out as a discredit—strong family affections; staunch adherence to home ties; strange tenacity to cling to country and home, to village of nativity, and to the religion of our fathers—have sprung up solely from this cause. All honour to those from whom emanated this noble conception of womanhood, whose immutability is strange, and its imperviousness to time and influences of the highest kind astonishing.

Implicit obedience to the man to whom the woman is mated, and purity, are its only chief features. Says the poet; “The woman

- that worships not God, but her husband, when such an one says—let there be rain and it descends.” Here is a spirit of thorough dependence, which elevates her over the man. Her mission in the world is to obey and not to command, to serve but not to rule. She should irretrievably bind herself to one only, and think of nobody else in her heart. If he dies she should ascend the funeral pyre and be consumed to ashes with her dead husband, or be doomed to perpetual widowhood, to think of her lost one, grieve for him, pray for the repose of his soul, till she herself is gathered to him. But, if she dies, he is not to die with her nor remain a widower all through life. Man has thus admitted himself to be the inferior of the woman, and has ranked himself with a lower order of the human kind. He took care to keep her at the highest, and exacted from her a higher order of human virtue, purity, and love. Blessed be the daughters of Ind. The sword of the tyrant may pierce to spill the blood of her sons; famines may starve them to death; plague and pestilence may come to carry them away in thousands and tens

of thousands; but if in the home, where they take their last leave of the world, their angels are ever ready to minister to them with true love and devotion, to nobly endure the troubles, and remain behind to pray for the repose of their souls,—that alone is sufficient to compensate for the rest.

The Princess Ambiga was an ideal Hindu woman. The story of her marriage with Saluva is a little romance in itself. She was a daughter of the house of Vijianagar, and Saluva, being related to that house, was from his infancy brought up in the royal palace, and by intelligence and ability gradually came to win the confidence of the ruler. It was at one of the yearly gatherings of the great feast of the *Ten Nights*—when Hindu chivalry is seen at its best; when every prince and noble, with any pretensions to independence, celebrates it on a vast and magnificent scale to commemorate the great war of the Mahabarata, the conflict between virtue and vice; when great gatherings meet in large amphitheatres specially constructed for the purpose in every court; where the brave are attracted to it; where the fair of the land

centre around; where sports and exercises are held; where music and poetry flourish and are amply rewarded—it was, on one such occasion, when the king's gymnast was warring with a tiger let loose in the open space in the centre below, that the incident took place. In the eagerness to win the prize, and in the assurance of success, the over-confident champion ran towards the tiger to despatch him with one stroke before he had time to recover himself from his new surroundings and to attack his opponent. The warrior having done it hastily, and the tiger also, perhaps, being more wily than the rest of his class, very cleverly dodged his opponent's aim, so much so that the hasty conduct of the gymnast, who missed his aim, as well as the cunning of the beast, combined to bring about the union of two hearts. There was noise from the crowded amphitheatre. The brute got confused, and in the eagerness to get out of the second aim of his opponent, who was planning it, ran towards that part of the amphitheatre where the women of the royal household were seated, screened from public view, it having appeared to the brute

as the only part that was vacant, and, therefore, admitted of an easy egress. Instantly a shriek was heard from the women's quarters. There was worse confusion and uproar. The people were getting wildly and madly confused when Saluva, then a youth of twenty-two, in holiday attire, with nothing but his sharp dagger in his waist, took the heavy turban he wore, wound it round his left arm, and boldly stepped into the awful space below, and stood right opposite to the tiger, that was then sitting on his hind legs, wagging his tail, ready to make a high spring which would land him outside. Quick as thought the brave youth inserted his thickly-bandaged arm into the brute's awful mouth and despatched him with his sharp dagger. Thus was a terrible situation averted, and it was pure love alone by which Ambiga, one of the princesses who were witnessing this daring feat of courage and chivalry and extreme self-denial, married him. The story of their marriage was thus a romantic one.

Ambiga loved her husband fondly, and was in turn dearly loved by him. To her he was the husband, her lord, nay, her house-

hold deity, whom she would worship every day, and then attend to her daily duties. The first duty of a Hindu wife being implicit obedience, anything the husband does, though it may seem ignoble to her, must have her approval; and Ambiga obeyed her husband, not because he was a head-strong, self-willed tyrant, but because he loved her sincerely; and she was prepared to do what he wished out of pure love for him and out of the faith she was brought up in from her childhood. Thus it was that Saluva worked through his wife to produce the intended result. To her he broke the fact of his ardent love and admiration for the village maiden, the daughter of the palace servant. With Ambiga this was a matter to be obeyed and not questioned. Her ideal of chastity consisted in that and nothing else; and thus it was that she came to take an interest in Padmini and eventually to appoint her a maid-of-honour. The girl was always with the queen in her apartments, and after they had become sufficiently known to each other, and even mutually attached, Ambiga good-naturedly broached the subject of the girl's marriage.

“Dear Padmini,” said she, “age has shown all human beauties to perfection on thy face. The jasmine blooms in the desert and breathes its fragrance, to be wafted by the desert air; of what avail is it? The moon, that shines in the wilderness, bathing in its light the trees, the murmuring rivulets, and the brooks, the hills and rocks and natural bowers; of what use is it? The charms of thy beauty, thy grace, they shine, to be of no use. A noble husband should be thy lord to admire those beauties, and they are so good that it is only the highest in the land should receive thy hand. Sister and friend, think of this seriously.”

“No, madam,” said the brave, simple girl, “it is love, pure and simple, that finds for one her lord. While that love burns not in my breast what use is there of thinking of that at all? Know, madam, love in woman is not made to order, but instinctively rises in the woman’s breast unknown to herself; and no such risings I see in me.”

“But there is the noble and mighty ruler of the land, and love him if you will. Nurture that love, water it with your daily thoughts

and feelings by thinking of his greatness and strength and of his fond attachment for you, and soon it will grow and prosper and yield the fruit to produce at last the sacred marriage tie."

"No, madam. Have you not heard of the saying of our country—saying as old as it is pregnant with wisdom—*The fruit must of itself get ripe*. But the unwise men of our country, hasty, rather, take the fruits that are not ripe, put them into the pot, tightly close the mouth, and, through a small aperture, blow, that the smoke may ripen them. Ripe, no doubt; but are they sweet? They are not half so sweet as those which ripen of their own accord."

"Ripen or not ripen, that depends upon yourself. I do not forcibly blow or breathe that love into you to ripen in your breast a half-hearted love. There is the object towards which your attachment could be directed, and it is for you to give it its natural growth, and it is all a matter of your own will and like. The seed has only to be planted. The rest is all your work."

"No, madam. Of what use is the seed,

when the soil is not fit to receive it—when there is no love there; and true love—how does it rise? It is a sudden impulse—it is a sudden gushing out from the inmost spring of the woman's heart, which an accident, an incident, a noble deed, a chivalrous action taps, and up it rises, suddenly taking its course, forming shapes, till at last it ends in hymeneal blessing. Such, madam, is true love. It is sweet to love, no doubt, but sweeter still is it to be loved. The love must be reciprocal. Rough, uncouth, village maiden as I am, I cannot love Saluva, for the story of his wrongs and misdeeds I have heard of. Instead of love it is pure hatred that burns in my breast—hatred of him that has sinned before God.”

“Ah, sister!” retorted Ambiga, much agitated by this plain speaking of the girl and by this appeal to God, “nature, that endowed you with the beauties that are seen to such perfection on your form, has not intended that they should waste away unadmired. That nature has intended a use for them, and such use you should make of them as best befits our rules of society and

the rules which our religion and morals ordain. Do, therefore, hasten to bring that to action, and one moment wasted is one moment in our life spent in vain, and, therefore, it becomes a sin."

"Yes, too true," said Padmini, suppressing her anger at this reference to sin, "that same nature, that so kindly gave all these beauties to perfection, as you say, bestows them on those from whom she expects the sorest trials and the most difficult penances. Opportunities and occasions there will be many, when the object, upon which nature has lavished her treasures, will need all her or his best and inmost qualities to withstand the trials, which will be sore and severe indeed, and by me, on whom those beauties are showered, there are more dangers to be coped with and difficulties to be borne than there are in the case of other mortals who are ordinarily endowed, and that is the very reason why I should be more careful and circumspect; and I should be betraying the trust and the special graces I am the recipient of if I should, caring more for worldly riches, power, and glory, and all

earthly pleasures, and taking advantage of thy advice, queen as thou art, yield to the stormy passion of each and everyone that wishes to spend it on me. I would then be unworthy of being a woman."

"But how long are you to be so if you should refuse every offer—especially this offer—which even the best in the land would only be too glad to avail herself of? Your mind is a blank, you say. There doth not burn that love in you, and, should it so last for ever, better you had not lived. You would then have lived in vain. Surely our Maker, who has been so kind to you, has not intended you to be so."

"Yes, madam! that Maker who created me will take care of me. Knowest thou not the saying of our country and of our men: *He that planted the tree will assuredly water it?* The time will come, and come suddenly, when that feeling called *love*—I know not what it is now—will assuredly, of its own accord, shape itself, and only when God ordains it. That is my firm belief. What has been preordained will surely come to pass, we know not how. These truths I learnt to babble in my child-

hood, and my parents lulled me to sleep with songs of such high truths, on their knees. God sees those preordained laws fulfilling of their own accord. This is the truth, madam. I know I shall be linked soon. My husband, I know, was ordained by God. That was when first I took inception in my mother's womb. The man who is ordained to wed me knows not whom he will wed and I know not who he is, but the slightest circumstance will bring it to action, and God alone will see to it, for, hear what the poet says :

“ ‘ Call it not chance the link that binds men's hearts,
But Heaven's sacred gift to sweeten life.
It is the hand divine that guides man's life
From the inception to the very end ;
And preordained laws, they must perforce
Be anywise fulfilled, and He alone
It is that sees their strict fulfilment here.
For ah ! why should the noblest maiden and
The fairest and the wisest in the land
Be mated to the meanest wretch through life ?
All that is deemed the highest in the world—
Beauty and honour, valour, virtue, wealth,
All these avail her not, her mind is blank ;
She herself knows not whom to love and wed ;
Not e'en dear friendship kindles in her breast
The lamp of love, but suddenly
A passing stranger's glance, a simple look
Instinctive plants that love, which slow takes shape,

Despite a thousand counterforces, till
At last the final end is reached ; a look
Is thus enough to bind two hearts for life,
And this is but the true fulfilment of
A preordained law that, in the life
Before, had all but reached perfection full,
Or their appointed shape had all but taken.
And in the new life easily attains
The end ; such, then, the truth of all such things. '

CHAPTER V

TWO WOMEN OF OLD

THE antagonism between Ambiga and Padmini, the princess and her maid, which hitherto had found vent in friendly advice and admonition on the one hand and respectful refusal and mild protest on the other, culminated at last in the conversation narrated in the previous chapter, wherein certain plain things and unpalatable truths were said in tones bold and firm. Two Hindu women, with hearts pure and characters spotless, brought up in the same faith, were thus thrown together. The one saw in that faith an ideal of womanhood quite different from that which the other saw. The one read and understood it not in the same light as the other. There was the same purity of intention animating their thoughts, the same reverence and implicit obedience to their common religion characterising their opinions and convictions; yet they were diametrically opposed to each other. The one was a

woman brought up in the highest stratum of society, with none of its concomitant evils of pride, eternal love of luxury, a hankering after fancies and fashions, but a woman, withal, possessing all the qualities of one of humble origin in life. The other a village girl, uneducated, rude-fashioned, and unpolished, not used to wealth and luxuries, but spurning them when thrown in her way, was naturally more gifted; and when the inmost vigour of her mind was roused it seemed as if she were the proudest woman in the land. The one was like a topaz cut and polished in the finest manner possible by a skilled workman, glittering with all the lustre it was capable of possessing. The other was like a rough, uncut diamond stone, without a flaw, and of the finest water, its pristine purity and lustre hidden, but that lustre a thousand times more bright, and that purity inestimably more valuable. Such were the differences between the two. With reference to love and marriage, which are of the highest concern to the woman, the motto for the one was: *I love whom I wed*; for the other: *I wed whom I love*. With natures so dissimilar—constantly

warring with each other upon a matter of the highest importance to them ; the one actuated by a desire to implicitly obey her husband and please him and to see to the fulfilment of his every wish, the other spurning such an idea as altogether low and debasing ; the one, though less intelligent, yet more polite and sustained in her ways of putting forth her feelings and ideas ; the other more gifted, her conversation bristling with wisdom. but rough and uncouth in its manner and form—it was clear that such a state of things could not long continue, and it seemed as if the village girl were destined to get the better of it in the end ; and so it really happened.

“Madam ! it does not become you to induce a poor maiden, quite against her will, to snatch away from you the joys of which you are the rightful possessor, and advise me that I should be what you are to your husband, that, after some time, both of us may be shunted out and a third planted in his affections. Though, no doubt, you should obey your husband, it certainly is not in a matter of this kind, affecting the very spirit of womanhood. I cannot bring myself to

think how you could propose my marriage with your husband. Although our religion sanctions the marriage by man of more than one wife it is not in a case of this nature ; and I cannot find any authority in that religion, which you and I follow and believe in, for the course you are now adopting." Such was the tone that Padmini assumed on one occasion, and such were her words given out with feeling, and Ambiga, abashed at this plain speaking, was forced to explain her position and, in her littleness, and perhaps thoughtlessness, hastened to narrate the following story from the *Mahabharata* more in the spirit of self-defence and self-exculpation than with a desire to see it accepted as worthy of imitation. It was the story of the Princess Nalayini.

"This Aryan princess," she began, "was the beautiful daughter of a great and mighty king of old. She was so beautiful that many powerful princes sought her hand in marriage ; and, unlike the majority of her sisters of the land in those days, she was learned, and was well versed in all the writings of her country's language, hence her desire to marry one who

came up to her ideal of manhood. It was in vain: therefore a good many ruling princes, rich and mighty, went away unsuccessful, for she wanted to marry one after her own heart; and she found none. One day a pious youth, wise and learned, who gave himself up to religious meditation in the forest, went to the king and requested him to give his daughter to him in marriage. The father replied: 'I want not wealth to enrich my daughter; I want no kingdoms for her to rule as Queen; I want no precious gems to adorn her person; but only win her love and you have my consent.' And so the youth went to the princess, who, satisfied with his great learning and true piety, and satisfied also that he fulfilled her requirements, consented to marry him. The marriage was in due course performed, and the husband, without giving his newly-married spouse sufficient time to gradually break away from her surroundings and from the associations of home, and to adopt herself to her new circumstances, said: 'To the wilderness, far away from human habitations, I go to spend my time in prayer and meditation. If you wish to stay in your

father's home I shall not go against that wish ; but if you wish to accompany me, give up everything of this world and follow me. In my desert abode you will have no good food ; you will have to live on fruits and roots ; you will have to sleep on bare ground, on stones and thorns. You will have no opportunity to hear sweet music there ; but you will have instead the incessant dreadful roarings of wild beasts. There are no spacious halls there, but a lonely, humble dwelling made of rushes and leaves. Such is life, O dear wife ! in my desert abode.' To which the brave wife replied, in a manner worthy of her greatness and goodness : 'Where my husband is, there my home is. Where my lord lives, there lies my little heaven. All this power and glory and these worldly possessions have no charms for me when you are absent. Wherever you go I will follow you.' So saying, she took leave of her parents and everyone near and dear to her, and accompanied her husband alone to the forest for the first time in her life. Dear Padmini ! now comes the painful part of my story. It grieves me to tell it. It came to pass that some time after their

marriage, while in the wilderness, the husband was attacked with leprosy, which is a most painful disease, painful to the person suffering from it, and painful to those whose lot is cast with him, and painful also because there is no remedy for its cure, and the unhappy being lives with no hope in his breast, although in all other things of this world man lives by hope, sustains himself, even amidst unconquerable difficulties and trials, with that life-giving hope. Her new condition the good wife accepted cheerfully in the spirit of the teaching of our religion. She bathed her lord every day tenderly, and did all things necessary for his daily worship with scrupulous care, so much so that he did not feel the troubles and the difficulties of his bodily condition. In time the disease grew worse, and you know it is a duty enjoined on the wife to eat of the remainder left by the husband. One day it so happened that, owing to the acute stage the disease was in, a portion of one of his fingers fell into the food left by him for his wife without his knowing it. When the good wife found it she took it and laid it aside and ate the food without expressing the

least disgust. Nor was this all, and I ask your particular attention to this part of the story. One day the husband, sickly as he was, told his wife that he loved another woman, and asked her to bring about the desired end ; and Nalayini, without expressing the least repugnance, like a true and good wife, bowed to his wishes. The husband, overjoyed, blessed his wife and said that he tried her in this manner how far she, a princess, was prepared to obey her husband under impossibilities and superhuman difficulties. Such, my child, is the good story of the true and the faithful Nalayini, whose wifely virtues are, as you know, sung by every maiden in our land."

Padmini, without waiting for Ambiga to finish the story and draw the moral, immediately interrupted : " You wrong our books, madam ! you wrong our religion, and you wrong Nalayini and her husband. You have forgotten the chief effect of the story. There the pious husband had no thought of misbehaving himself, but only wished to test his wife's power of endurance under difficulties and trials of no ordinary kind. He was suffering from leprosy, and that is enough to

break the heart of any woman: but this proposal was the last straw to break her; did she give way? No. It was only a trial; there it ended for future generations of women to know and admire the woman who performed her duties under such difficulties. But here you wish to go further. However, madam, as you quote a story from our scriptures to justify your position, I will quote another from our books, which, I think, ought properly to be applied to our case.

“‘There lived hundreds of years ago in this part of our land a king who ruled on the banks of the Palar. One only daughter he had, and he loved her so intensely that he was ever ready to please her in every detail of her wishes. Her bathing toilet was an institution in itself: it was of the amplest kind. The good subjects of the king had such a reverence for his only daughter that it almost amounted to the feeling they had for the great heroes and heroines of our country. Every morning, as the princess bathed in her apartments in the seventh storey of the royal palace, the scented water flowed from the “Virgin’s Abode” there and joined a channel

which flowed through the heart of the royal city. Its volume was so great, its scent so sweet, and the yellow, on account of the saffron composing it, so deep that it imparted its fragrance and its colour even to the water of the channel throughout its course in the city. That channel is even to this day called "the Yellow Water Channel." The men of the city before wetting their feet to cross the channel reverently bent down and sprinkled a handful of water over their heads. One day the son of a neighbouring king, young and beautiful, was going through the city on horseback in disguise, and, on nearing the channel, spurred his horse, and both rider and horse landed on the other bank in an instant. The princess, who witnessed this performance, bold and unusual, concluding, from his face and demeanour, that the young man must be a stranger, owing no allegiance to her father, and that he must also be of royal blood, inwardly conceived a passion for him, and was resolved to marry him and no other. Immediately she tore a piece from the white silk cloth she was wearing and wrote thereon with the silver stick and the

black paint with which she was adorning her eyelashes at the time: "This morn I witnessed your bold action in leaping over the channel on your horse. You are, I know, of royal blood, though in disguise. I love you and no other. Meet me this even after nightfall, when the moon is ten fathoms high from the eastern horizon at the bower underneath the 'Virgin's Abode' in the palace garden. There you will hear my resolve to wed you." The letter was despatched by a faithful and intelligent maid, who soon found the stranger, and handed over to him the letter. Unfortunately the young prince was illiterate, and knew not how to read or write, and he was, therefore, compelled to take the communication to a lonely place and show it to a leper, who was the only person there, and, who, according to the custom and law of those days, was segregated and kept outside the town, and who also was a person least likely to take undue advantage of the contents of the communication. The leper, whose heart was as loathsome as the disease with which his body was afflicted, read the communication, and pretended to sympathise

with the friendless stranger. Said he: "You are young and beautiful and you seem to be a stranger to this land. Our princess saw you leaping over the channel this morning—an act irreverent and disloyal. It is a heinous offence. Some kind hand gives you a warning. Take advice and run away without a moment's hesitation." The stranger, terror-struck, soon ran away. The leper, at nightfall, went at the appointed hour to the appointed place. The princess came, and, in the clear light of the moon, saw, instead of the fair face of the prince whose image was indelibly fixed in her mind that morning, the loathsome face of a leper, and immediately concluded that her letter was intercepted and that some foul play was being enacted. She withdrew from the painful scene, when, to her surprise and horror, the bold leper ran forward to throw his arms around her body, and even succeeded in touching her. The princess ran away; and, stung with the thought that another than the person whom she loved and wished to marry had polluted her with his touch, and immensely grieved that she had thereby lost her chastity, ran to a neighbouring tank and drowned herself

there. The news of this catastrophe soon travelled far and wide, and the illiterate prince, coming to know of it, hastened to the sad but sacred spot and ended his life there also, for none but the princess was his wife in that life of his on earth, and never did a sadder funeral take place in that ancient royal city. Madam ! look on this picture and on that. It is divine law that woman must love and marry one only. It is equally divine that man must love one woman only and wed her and think of no other. 'This is the highest and purest form of human virtue.'"

CHAPTER VI

THE DIAMOND FROM THE VALLEY OF THE ADAMANT

OF all the sights in India that meet the modern traveller none is of more melancholy interest than places where stand great memorials of religion raised to commemorate a peculiar visitation of nature or manifestation in some striking form of natural phenomena. That characteristic of the Hindu, which attaches the highest importance to all that pertains to religion, has made him believe that divinity loves to reside in such places more than in any other, and that such phenomena are manifestations of the divine will. Where rivers meet; where, in the awful chasm or cleft of a mountain, interesting ice formations, resembling sacred symbols, appear; where, from great rocky heights, waterfalls have been coursing down incessantly; or where nature puts forth her best forms; or where the earth from her womb gives birth

to precious stones of rich lustre and lovely hue; in such places such interesting circumstances directed the genius of the people to architectural memorials in the form of temples to the Most High, whose vastness and symmetry and whose real beauty, even in the minutest parts, find no parallel in any other country in the world. And when, perhaps, the circumstances that caused the rearing of these grand edifices of piety no longer exist, when rivers have changed their courses and the earth no longer yields her rich treasures, these ancient monuments alone remain intact, and worship is conducted there as of old. Palaces and vast abodes raised around them, for the pious to stay and offer their devotions, are tottering or have already crumbled down, and the wisdom and the civilisation of the times, which found expression in those holy places in a thousand ways, these have vanished away, but the temples themselves remain, surrounded by a few straggling huts, peopled by those who perform the worship there and live upon the bounty of such as visit them to pay their devotions. And the tottering structures, where lived the wealth and the beauty of the

land in those times, are now inhabited by screeching bats, and in the clefts and crevices that time has made therein are found luxuriant growths of shrubs and plants ; and in place of the music and religious song and the chant of the Vedas that went forth from thousands there is heard the morning *picota* song of the lonely villager, sung to enliven the labour of watering his fields ; and the traveller who comes there to see the old structures, which piety has raised, and the ruins indicative of bygone opulence, wonders for a few moments at those sights, and disappears, as all other things there have disappeared.

Of such a nature is the village and the mine in the valley of the Adamant in Southern India. It is the oldest mine known in India, and, therefore, the oldest in the world, the parent of all that were discovered since in America and Africa. It yielded its inestimable treasures from the time when the great Asoka issued his famous edicts, preaching love and mercy to all living things on earth, till recent times, when the fierce Moslems came to India to plunder, and, as if in mockery of those edicts, counted millions of lives as of no avail,

whose blood ran like water in the streets of her rich cities. It had its share in the beautifying of the peacock throne of the great Moghul. Its diamonds adorned the crowns of the ancient monarchs of the land. From here came that priceless stone which, through various vicissitudes, went to the Hindu ; then to the Afghan, whose eyes were put out for its sake, as if those eyes were not fit enough to admire its lustre ; then to the Sikh ; and, finally, to the Crown of England ; and it may be the number is legion of adventurers whose cupidity it aroused, and who, before gaining it, waded through streams of blood ; and it may be there is many an unrecorded romance of love and adventure connected with it. From here, also, came the diamond, which the owner secreted in the gaping wound of the calf of his leg, caused for the purpose and kept fresh, as the place least likely to rouse suspicion, and which a skipper secured, after decoying the owner to a ship and throwing him overboard. Foreigners from Europe trod its soil in olden times and lived there in splendour, and many reigning sovereigns have, it is said, stones in

their crowns that came from this ancient mine of Southern India.

The name of the village in this valley is even to this day called Vajra Karuvur—the place that has the diamond in the womb. It has a deserted, weird-like appearance, as if some curse has fallen on it ; and there are not more than a hundred dwellings, most of them mean and lowly, and five hundred villagers, inhabiting them and subsisting by the cultivation of the lands around. Unlike other villages of the land, where the even tenor of the life of the people is not disturbed by anything special, this village has its constant sensations. Its chapters of accidents and chances are long and many. Interesting stories and adventures, attended with hair-breadth escapes, it has given birth to ; and stories are told by its present inhabitants, with that love natural to the Hindu for embellishing them with supernatural actions, which appear improbable.

For a long time this mine was worked with varying results, and at the time of our story—that is, about the seventeenth century—systematic and continual working for these valuable stones was given up, as the belief

was held, rightly or wrongly, that it had been worked out and the stones there all exhausted, and the only thing that remained to remind us of its existence in former times consisted in the villagers picking up stones of smaller dimensions that appeared on the surface after a heavy downpour of rain for the first time after the hot season—that is, about July or August. But this was once in a way broken by a man coming across a big-sized stone, or the cultivator's plough turning up to view the lustre of a hidden one. This, and the existence of one or two coarse machines of local make, worked by the hand and lying idle for years, perhaps decades, and ancient buildings in ruins, were the only landmarks to indicate the existence of this ancient mine of the East.

One day in the month of June, when as usual the sun set in all his glory and the night came on and the moon appeared on the clear sky, bathing the little village in her light and rendering everything cool, as if in recompense for the intense heat of the day, the villagers retired to bed; but, as is commonly the case with the eastern sky, it suddenly became overcast, and, for the space of about

four hours, in the midnight, the rain came down incessantly and then suddenly ceased. The sky again became clear, and the moon again shone in her usual splendour. In the morning the sun rose as brightly as on the previous day as if nothing had happened, and the simple people woke up to find the whole aspect of the place thoroughly changed, as if by the wand of the magician. Immediately there was bustle and noise everywhere. The whole village poured out her men into the fields outside, and there were seen spread, over a large area, groups of men and women, young and old, closely scanning the ground for hours without intermission, bending down, and each walking with steady steps, with the right upper arm tightly held by the left hand behind the back, in anxious expectation of coming across something valuable. Many were searching across places where the waters from the hills washed down into the space below, and, in so doing, made deep cuttings. Nor was this all. There were also seen on the morning of that day, approaching the village in great haste on horseback, agents of rich merchants and wealthy chiefs, to be the

first, perhaps, to buy all the big stones found before others came and made the competition keener. Many petty merchants also came there, each with a small bag of coins to buy up the small pickings, and innumerable bazaars of grain and other articles of daily use were put up for the villagers to exchange them for the small stones found by them. Thus it was that man and nature both combined to convert this lonely place into a scene at once new and magical, and thus it was that this little village, which the day before presented a dry and parched-up appearance, with no pretension to plenty and no reason to be called rich, was transformed, before the morning of the next day, into a small emporium, full of bustle and activity, full of money and various articles of human consumption; and it may be that, in an instant, one of its inmates may come by a valuable treasure which can buy a kingdom, or secure for him who buys it the hand of the handsomest woman of the land.

And so it really happened. A veritable treasure in the shape of a large stone was found on that morning. At about eight o'clock a poor villager observed, at a distance

from his place, the reflection of the sun's rays from a small speck on the ground. Off he ran, and, to his utter astonishment and joy, found a stone embedded in the earth, with a small point protruding on the surface. Scraping away the loose earth in which it was buried he took the stone, and found the colour to be of the purest white and its shape like that of an almond. It weighed about seventy carats, and, even in its original condition, showed signs of rich lustre. Such a stone had not been found there for many years, and the oldest inhabitant heard not of such a find in his time. The news ran like wild-fire amongst the people scattered there, and towards the valuable stone about a thousand men converged in a short time. There was a minute examination. It passed into the hands of hundreds, who reverently pressed it to their eyes, as precious stones are regarded with the deepest veneration by the Hindus. Thus it was that this particular diamond season of the village was ushered in by this interesting circumstance. For days and months this was the all-absorbing topic of the village.

According to the law of the land in those

days, stones of about forty carats and more in weight found in the mine were the property of the sovereign of the land, and though a heavy price was secretly offered for the diamond the offer was indignantly refused, and the headman and, in fact, all the people of the village were impervious to influences of this kind, for to be disloyal to the ruler and to cheat him of his due were, according to their religion, sins deserving of the worst punishment in hell; and though also an attempt was made by those who arrived in the morning on horseback to storm the village and carry away the stone by force, the vigilance of its men frustrated their object. The next day a festival was celebrated in honour of the village deity. In the evening the idol was taken out in procession through the streets. There were music and chanting of sacred hymns. The proceedings closed with the stone being placed at the idol's feet and then publicly delivered to the chief of the village, who straightway sent a respectful intimation to the ruler at Chandragiri—the lord paramount; the lord of the land, including treasure, water, stone and all in it; the lord

of kings, the mighty emperor, at whose feet innumerable tribute-paying vassals fall to make obeisance. A short description was given of the finding of the stone; the name of the person who found it; the size, colour, quality, and weight were duly mentioned; and the ruler was requested to send a trustworthy man to take possession of it in his name.

When Saluva, who was now the ruler at Chandragiri representing the Vijianagar house, received the news his joy knew no bounds, for he had no precious stone which could at all be considered worthy of his position as ruler of an ancient kingdom. This want weighed heavily on him, and he was longing to possess one at least. He had been foiled in his attempt to get at the ruby ring—the emblem of Vijianagar royalty—as also the other famous stones belonging to that historic family, when, by his orders, the king was put to death. Accordingly, when he heard of the discovery of this large stone at Vajra Karuvur and of the promise it gave, from the description sent to him of its lustre and beauty, he lost no time in despatching twenty of his best soldiers and his trusted kinsman

and officer of the household, Obalu, that same Obalu who, six years before, had been commissioned to put to death the immured king of Vijianagar and all his progeny. At the same time Saluva forwarded a firman, with his signature and seal, remitting three years' land revenue of the village for the loyalty of its people shown in his cause, and granting ten acres of land in that same village to be enjoyed free of tax in perpetuity by the lucky finder of the stone, from son to grandson, and so on in succession, while the sun and the moon should last. Obalu had also instructions from his master to remain at Vajra Karuvur for some time and have the stone polished by the local workman, according to the best of his skill, and return as soon as possible. Saluva's anxiety in this matter was, no doubt, natural, for it was considered an honour and even a fortunate circumstance for him to possess a diamond pure in colour, spotless in shape, without a flaw, large in size, and of more than usual brilliance, the talismanic influence of which might secure for him as his bride the woman he loved so passionately and wooed so unsuccessfully.

It is believed that stones possess influences of this kind. They are greatly coveted and bought with avidity at enormous prices, because of every kind of worldly happiness they are supposed to bring to the owners. To a king they are supposed to add more dominions to his crown, bring more tributary vassals to pay homage to him, and greater honour to the house he represents; and in India it is the popular belief at this moment that the great Queen Victoria owed her prosperous reign and her numerous progeny to the happy possession of the "Mountain of Light," which had its birth in India.

In time Saluva's officer and his well-chosen band of twenty reached the village, and publicly took possession of the stone. The firman was delivered with all due pomp and solemnity. The stone was given to be cut, and the village lapidary worked hard at it for some months, day and night, under the immediate supervision of Saluva's men. About thirty carats were lost by the polishing. And what was its condition after it underwent these few months' hard and incessant toil spent on it? "Iron, dug from central

gloom" and heated hot and "dipt in hissing baths" and battered to shape and use is not the iron in the idle ore, but a hundred times more useful and valuable to man. The lotus of the bright sunny day, that, with the rising of the morning sun, opens its petals and swells and displays its full beauty, and breathes its sweetest fragrance when fiercest beat the sun's rays, is not the lotus of the cold, dark night, that closes its petals to the moon at eve and all its beauties hides through silent night, but a hundredfold more lovable and sweet. Even so with this beautiful gem. It was not the same original, pebble-like stone, dim, uncouth, and rough, picked from the bare ground, but a hundred, nay a thousand, times more valuable and pleasing. The incessant wearing it had undergone but tended to bring out its lustre and its lovely character all the more,

"For beat the shining gold, it shines the more,
And crush the balmy leaf, it smells the more,
And press the sugar cane, it tastes more sweet,
E'en as benignant Heaven's chosen few,
By ills beset, by penance worn, reveal,
The more their sacred light t'illumine the world."

An auspicious day was selected by the

village astrologer, and the party set out with its valuable treasure from Vajra Karuvur, the place of its birth, where, in the gloom underground, it had lain for centuries, and which it now left, polished and refined, to play its part in love and adventure, in murder and conquest, by rousing man's lower passion for dark deeds or his higher nature for saintly action, but for which neither the one nor the other would have been enacted on life's scene.

CHAPTER VII

THE REFRACTORY CHIEFTAIN

ECHAMA NAICK was a bold chieftain, and a faithful vassal of the Vijianagar king. He was ever loyal and obedient to his sovereign. He was ruling a large portion of the country near Chandragiri as a semi-independent ruler. Six years ago, when Saluva usurped the throne, after suddenly pouncing upon the ruler and imprisoning him and his family, many chiefs flocked to the powerful Echama to range themselves under his banner, to fight under his leadership and dethrone and punish the usurper, but the ability and vigilance of Saluva frustrated their attempts, and they were one after another subdued by his victorious army. Echama alone of those who resented the usurper's action openly defied his authority, and sent reproachful replies when messengers were sent year after year for payment of the tribute due by him ; and he even hinted, more

than once, that he was prepared to resist Saluva if force were used for recovery of that tribute. He was growing more and more insolent, because he deeply resented the injustice done to his sovereign, and sorely took to heart the dastardly deed done to exterminate the reigning family. It was this bold chieftain who, according to a European chronicler of the times, carefully laid a plan for setting the immured king at liberty by causing a subterranean passage to be made from outside the royal town to the very dungeon in the palace where the unfortunate prince was confined. The plan was actually carried into effect. The underground passage was slowly, silently, and successfully completed. On the night appointed, the men entrusted with the mission of delivering the imprisoned monarch went to him, boldly led him and his people through the narrow, dangerous, and dark pathway underground, and had almost carried out their difficult task when, alas!—just at the time when the long-confined king and wife and children were about to emerge out of the town into the open space to see the starry heavens to which

they were strangers so long, to inhale the pure, fresh air so long denied to them, and to make free use on God's earth of their limbs, hitherto pent up in the small compass of a narrow room—one of the night watchers, who went out to ease himself, stumbled at the time into a pit, and his cries for help to extricate him from his perilous position roused his sleeping comrades, who instantly lighted up a torch. Thus it was that, in one short moment, a noble enterprise, carefully planned and faithfully carried out, was revealed, not through any defect of organisation, any weakness of those who were entrusted with the mission, or through the over-vigilance of the watchmen, but revealed, like many other attempts made in the cause of humanity, of justice and of truth, by a trivial circumstance, which to many would appear as one that takes place every day by accident or chance, but which really was the result of a pre-ordained law. Thus it was that this adventure of this loyal chieftain failed just at the time when it was all but carried into effect. The result of the failure was that the unfortunate prince and those connected

with him were more securely guarded and put to worse difficulties. The subsequent history we know from what took place as narrated at the commencement of this story. Echama never forgave Saluva for killing their sovereign lord; and it was even said that the king, before he put an end to his life, sent information to his faithful vassal of the fate that was about to befall him and all dear to him. It was said also that, while all the other chieftains submitted to the inevitable by bowing to the new ruler's authority, Echama alone disowned it, not so much for the aggrandisement of his own power and the proclaiming of his independence as for the strong hope, by which he was inspired, that he might one day find out someone better entitled to the Vijianagar throne and restore it to him.

This Echama Naick, having heard glowing accounts of the diamond found in Vajra Karuvur; of its shape, colour, and lustre; of its having been polished in the village; and of even the exact day selected by the astrologer for Saluva's men to leave the place in charge of the stone, was possessed of an

intense desire to possess himself of it. He was extremely anxious that it should not go into the hands of the unscrupulous regicide, who was really not entitled to it. Accordingly he took a number of his most trusted adherents, and was hovering about the outskirts of the village for a number of days. In India, about the time of which we are writing, travelling from one place to another was attended with serious dangers to life and property. The country was in an extremely disturbed condition, and men, bold and impetuous, who could secure a handful of faithful men to serve under them became petty rulers; and these petty chiefs combined in themselves the virtues of a real ruler of men and the vices of a fierce dacoit. They were loved by their men and retainers, who would even give their lives for their masters, and the masters, in their turn, treated the men kindly; but, when it came to the matter of plundering a rich man, or even some village, there were no scruples, no ideas of right and wrong; and, for the sake of paltry money, murders were committed, villages burnt, and even the honour of women spoiled. The country was,

therefore, unsafe for travelling, and the little compact body duly left the village with the necessary precautions, at night, at the time selected as auspicious, in conveyances which, in those times, were rude and rough ; and they had necessarily to be made so on account of the state of the roads. In fact, there were no roads in those days worth the name, the only ways for conveyances being those made at random by drivers, who always took the easiest and the most convenient route, and there were often a number of ways for reaching a single destination.

In India, even in modern times, travelling is invariably done during nights on account of the extreme, insufferable heat during the daytime. Not till a number of conveyances assembled and got ready would the travellers move from a village, and always carts to the number of some hundreds go together, one after the other, for fear of robbers. Accordingly, when our travellers left the village at the appointed hour in the night, in the company of some hundreds, Echama Naick closely followed them at a distance. When all the conveyances were sufficiently far

away from the village, and when the night, too, was far advanced, he began operations, which consisted in two of his nimble men silently approaching the cart in which Obalu was sleeping with the diamond securely tied in his headdress. The twenty men of the guard were sleeping in other carts, as they were not apprehensive of any immediate danger. The carts were going one after the other at a slow pace, and the drivers were all fast asleep. The two men, without making the least noise, unyoked the bulls of the spotted cart and drove them away into the plains on either side of the track. Then these two men took the place of the bulls, and dragged the cart along for some time, while the rest of their party began hurling stones from slings, in the use of which they were adepts. The bulls got frightened, and were running fast. The drivers and the travellers were roused from their sleep, and they lost their senses. Of all the defects in Hindu character none is so stupid and inexplicable as the want of courage exhibited at a time when that courage is most required, and the losing of self-control when anything

sudden or unforeseen happens. There was a general confusion. The first thought that actuated everyone on that occasion was self-preservation, and the drivers, without exception, tried to run away from the danger as fast as possible by goading on the bullocks to run faster. When this sudden stampede was going on, the two men, who were dragging Obalu's cart along, dropped the yoke and disappeared. The result was that this cart alone was left behind while the rest disappeared from the scene. The armed band of twenty men alone remained to face the unseen enemy who now was slowly converging upon the cart. The men stood close together like a small compact mass, unmoved by the stones that came on them thick and fast with wonderful speed and precision. A stubborn resistance was offered, and the enemies closing in, found, to their chagrin, a fighting party prepared to defend to the last. There was a sharp engagement, and the superior numbers of the attacking party annihilated the small but heroic band, so much so that eight of them fell dead and the rest were mortally wounded. Some of Echama's men

also were severely wounded. Obalu, who had the diamond, and who took no part in the fight, was the only one on his side who was left uninjured. His person was searched, and the diamond not being found, force was used to make him give it up. One of Echama's men hit on the plan of untying his headdress, which he did in rather an unceremonious manner, when lo ! from one of the folds inside, the stone fell glittering to the ground. When the man stooped down to pick it up Obalu drew the scimitar from his waist and buried nearly the whole of that instrument in his victim's body. The man fell, and Obalu, straightway snatching the stone, swallowed it. Echama, who hitherto intended to save Obalu's life, lifted his sword in earnest, without a moment's hesitation, to cut him in twain and take out the stone. The instinct of self-preservation, the thought of instant death, made Obalu throw out the gem from the mouth, wherein it was cleverly concealed. Then Echama ordered his men to save him and take him a prisoner, when the dying agonies of the man lying pierced with the scimitar moved his brother, who also formed

one of Echama's party. That brother, regardless of his master's intention, and even his express command, despatched Obalu with a single stroke of his sharp sword, and, wildly brandishing it, exclaimed, standing defiantly before his master. "I care not for your order. I killed him that killed my dear brother. Death is his just reward. Let no one accuse me of this act. This sword, reeking with fresh blood, will spill the blood of him that does so." Echama, like a born leader of men, understood the situation at once, and replied, without the slightest trepidation: "Well done, my brave man. You have, like a real warrior and true brother, performed a just and noble deed. Here is my ring to grace the hand that did it, and let it remain there for ever." So saying, Echama himself put the ring on the man's finger. Thus was a dangerous situation averted by his tact, and thus was the priceless gem secured for him. Then he returned home, feeling proud that, in all his actions by which he openly defied Saluva's authority, none there was that gave him and his people so much delight and gratification as this one of boldly securing the priceless and the much-wished-for diamond.

“Is there no one among my faithful men to put this troublesome vassal down? His spirit and example is sure to be followed by others. My kingdom will soon be dismembered, my glory will be gone, and I will be reduced to the position of a petty chieftain myself. These six years, since I assumed the sovereignty of the land, Echama not only refused to pay the tribute due by him, but called me to fight in open field; and now this diamond, which I so long anxiously expected, is gone; and my men and trusted officer and friend, my faithful Obalu—they are gone too. Is there no one to curb his pride? I mind not the loss of tribute. I mind not the death of my men and my Obalu. This stone, oh! this priceless gem, who will secure it for me?” Thus exclaimed Saluva, in the spirit of utter helplessness, and perhaps of desperation too, one morning in his audience chamber in the presence of his nobles, generals, and state officials, when news was brought to him about the loss of the diamond. There was deep silence in the hall, and those present at the time noticed tears trickling down his cheeks. It seemed as if he

had lost a thing upon which depended his whole future happiness, in fact his very existence ; a thing by which he sought the fulfilment of a long-cherished desire ; by which he hoped to win the hand of the woman he had so long and so persistently wooed. Up rose the brave Chennapa, after an anxious pause, and said : “ My royal master ! I will instantly go. I want not men nor money to subdue the rebel chief, but give me ten of thy faithful men and ten of thy best steeds. In three days I will come back with the diamond.”

CHAPTER VIII

THE OBSCURE VILLAGE BOY

CHENNAPA was the son of an obscure villager. Some years ago it happened that Saluva wanted to raise an army to put down rebel chiefs, and he sent his clever and discreet men to the villages in his dominions to select young, capable youths. Chennapa was playing hide-and-seek with the other boys of his village in the presence of their elders, and the king's men, finding the youth far above the rest in strength and endurance, selected him. The boy, too, ambitious even at that time of his age, gladly took leave of his poor parents and everyone in the village, where he was the general favourite. In Saluva's palace the youth, who was well favoured, was taught all the manly arts—the use of the sling, the bow, and the sword, and in a short time rose to be the most skilful adept at them. Saluva, whenever he left the capital to hunt in the forests took Chennapa with

him. One day, tired of tracking a beast, the party rested under a huge mango tree in the forest. There was no water there to be had; and Saluva, weary and thirsty, rested under the shade of the tree in the mid-day heat. While he lay there his eyes rested on the topmost branch of the tree, at the end of which hung a cluster of fruits, almost ripe, which the owner left alone, either because of the difficulty of reaching it or because it escaped his view—but there it hung—and Saluva's eyes rested on it, and straightway his parched mouth watered. Then said he to his followers, who were near: "Which of you here will bring those fruits to me to assuage my thirst?" Many were the ways discussed to bring down the fruits. One thought of fearlessly going up to the topmost branch; but this was objected to on the ground that it was slender and would give way to the man's weight. Another thought of his sling, when he was asked to desist for fear of the fruits falling and breaking to pieces. While this was going on the impatient Saluva exclaimed: "Is there no one here that will now bring those fruits for me to taste their

luscious juice and quench my thirst?" The moment this was said, Chennapa took his boomerang and hurled it with as much strength as was required to cut the stalk with the bunch clean off the branch, and, when it fell, he cleverly caught it with his hands. This dexterous performance of a practised hand pleased Saluva immensely. He ate the fruits, half sweet, half sour, which only the parched mouth of an Indian knows how to relish. This little incident raised Chennapa greatly in the estimation of his master, who ordered that he should henceforth be by his side, and thus it was that he became Saluva's trusted personal attendant.

Accordingly, when Chennapa offered to undertake the perilous task of bringing the diamond in three days, Saluva, far from doubting his ability to perform the work successfully, most willingly allowed him to choose his men. With them the brave youth, who was only eighteen years of age, sallied forth, and appeared one morning at the gate of Echama's fort. There he demanded audience, and, having been allowed to go in, left two of his men at the gate, and proceeded

with the rest cautiously, till he found himself at the entrance of the room where the chief sat on the cushioned floor attending to the affairs of his petty state, fanned by a servant and guarded by two stalwart men with drawn swords. Chennapa, stationing his eight men at the entrance and giving them full directions to mow down anyone that might oppose them at the critical stage of the interview, went near the chief, made his low obeisance, and delivered his message.

Echama, after reading the mandate demanding the diamond, said to the youth, who was on his knees all the time: "Go and tell your master I am prepared to fight him, and not one coin shall he have from me. Should he fight in open battle and subdue me, then shall the diamond be sent to him."

This said, Chennapa drew his sword buckled to his waist, and, in the twinkling of an eye, pounced upon the proud chieftain, who fell on his back on the soft seat, and, with the raised sword in one hand and with the other hand on the victim's throat, demanded him to put down the stone immediately and save his life. He added, in bold, clear tones, that

if orders were not straightway issued to the palace treasurer to comply with the demand he would run his sword through the chieftain's body.

The two stalwart men, who were guarding their master's person, were terror-struck at this audacious act of the stranger, and were for a time mute, not knowing what to do. But soon they gathered courage and would have despatched the brave youth had not the helpless chieftain asked them to desist and save his life, because he knew Chennapa meant business in real earnest, careless of his own life, for, when they tried to move, the young man said: "Raise but one finger of the hand and your master welters in blood, here." The attendants became more terror-struck, and the refractory chieftain, who, till now, in the pride of his strength, cared not for the ruler who had become the paramount lord, was a helpless penitent, beseeching a beardless youth to save his life.

Then said the messenger: "*Thy life I will spare, for you plead for mercy. I plead for justice, and ask you to give what is justly due by you. Give thy signet ring; I shall*"

send it to the treasurer of your household, who will deliver out the stone."

"But why," said Echama, gathering some breath, "do you thus boldly risk your life for the merciless tyrant and the unscrupulous regicide? Know you not the story of Saluva—how he ascended the throne by treachery and bloodshed? He killed my dear sovereign. Are you not sorry to serve him?"

The bold youth replied: "I eat his salt, and am bound to be faithful to him."

The chieftain, finding that even this last resource of appealing to the youth's moral feelings was of no avail, handed over his signet ring to the young man, who called in one of his men stationed at the entrance, gave him the signet ring, and asked him to go to the treasurer and come back with the stone at once. The ring was taken. The treasurer delivered the stone, for it was the strict injunction of the chief that whoever came to him with the signet ring, must be obeyed. Whatever was demanded, the same should be given forthwith without demur. In a few short moments the diamond was brought.

Chennapa let go his hold of the chieftain, and

reached the outer gate of the palace with his men before that chieftain had time to gather courage and plan for action. Immediately they leapt on their steeds and vanished from view ; and within the allotted time Chennapa placed the stone before his master. This remarkable feat of heroism, cool courage, and self-denial raised the young favourite to the position of a courtier. The son of the obscure villager now became not only the most favoured of the nobles of the court, but also the most popular hero of the people. His fearless courage became the favourite theme of bards ; his name was in the mouth of everyone. Young maidens anxiously watched to catch a glimpse of him whose beauties were extolled by bards and sung in the streets of Chandragiri. But Saluva, in the joy of the moment for having so miraculously come by the stone, forgot all about this public applause and open lionising of Chennapa, and ordered his men to furnish the court astrologer with full particulars of the stone, its weight, shape, quality, colour, the date and hour when it was taken from the bosom of the earth to see the light of day from its sleep of ages,

and the hour and minute when Saluva received it from Chennapa to behold its beauties, that the astrologer may faithfully write out its future according to the rules of his ancient art.

Astrology is the most favoured of the arts in India: it is also the most remunerative. No Hindu will commence doing a thing: start a business, build a house, perform a marriage, buy a bullock, or turn the first sod with his plough unless he consults his favourite astrologer. Every village has its astrologer, who is indispensable to Hindu society. The man well versed in the starry lore is at all times welcome at the cottage of the peasant as well as at the mansion of the prince. The court astrologer at Chandragiri belonged to a family distinguished for its proficiency in the art. He gained the full confidence of Saluva after he became ruler by one or two circumstances, by which his ability to foretell events was put to severe tests. It is an interesting story how Saluva, as soon as he usurped the throne, tested this astrologer's proficiency. It was one of his duties as court astrologer to attend the palace

every evening and recount to his master beforehand the events of the next day. Saluva imposed the additional duty of requiring him to write on a piece of palm leaf the name of the gate, out of the eight gates of the Chandragiri fort, through which he might happen to pass on horseback the next morning to ride through the streets of the town, and deliver it at the palace after carefully wrapping and sealing it. Every day, as soon as he returned from his ride, Saluva would open the seal and would be overjoyed to see written on the palm leaf the name of the gate through which he had actually passed in the morning. This went on for some time, and there was not a single instance in which the astrologer failed. One morning, when Saluva started from the palace on horseback as usual, a sudden thought struck him. Immediately he directed his men to demolish a portion of the fort wall, and made his exit through the opening, just enough to allow him and his horse to pass through. He returned home and anxiously broke open the seal, and lo! to his great wonderment, found written on the leaf the words *Navadwara*—

new opening. Thus his faith in the astrologer's mastery over his art became strong, so much so that he implicitly believed whatever was foretold. With this implicit faith and in the sure expectation of a happy event, he handed over the diamond of Vajra Karuvur to his favourite astrologer, to write out its future history, and how it would affect his future happiness in life as the proud possessor of that great stone.

Such, in short, was the career of the son of the obscure villager, who fearlessly secured for his master this invaluable diamond of the Valley of the Adamant, and such is also a brief description of the court astrologer into whose hands it was delivered for its horoscope to be cast.

CHAPTER IX

THE ASTROLOGER'S PREDICTIONS

“ A PERFECT gem of matchless beauty. Colour pure white. Shape, lovely. Lustre—how can I describe it? Who would essay the task must seek only the language of the gods. Among precious stones the diamond belongs to the male order; the ruby to the female. This prince among diamonds is fit to be mated only to a princess among rubies; and which could it be, except the ruby of the ring belonging to our ancient royal house? Soon this prince will mount a throne of gold and shine there among a bevy of fair maidens, like the moon among the stars, among rows of pearls on either side. He who happens to be the fortunate possessor will have more than the usual share of the pleasures or the sorrows of this life according as his heart is pure or impure. If the owner be a man whose character is not as beautiful as the gem itself he will become degraded in society and dis-

honoured, so much so that he will descend to the level of a menial to his own servant, a mighty ruler though he may be, and ignominious death will be his end. But should it, on the other hand, be owned by one whose virtues shine as brilliant, then, though he may be the most obscure mortal, it will elevate him to the highest position in the world—make him a king of kings. He will perform deeds that will secure perpetual peace and happiness to mankind—deeds that will live in history. What is more, it will win for him the hand of the most beautiful maiden in the land. Should a woman become the proud owner, one whose form is as lovely as its shape, whose character is as spotless and pure as its colour, why, its talismanic influence will silently and mysteriously light the lamp of love in her breast, even though that holy feeling might never have burned there before, and will continuously feed the flame, till it induce the fair owner to openly avow it; and, though poor, she will, in the end, wed a real prince. I am not able to see further, for the vision is dim, but the tendencies point to its leaving the land of its birth a few years hence. It will reach a country in

the remote corners of this world, where her sons will fight the holy battle of freedom and secure it for ever for their children and children's children, and thereafter give something of that freedom to the land of its nativity and give eternal peace and joy to her sons."

Such were the predictions of the astrologer—some as dubious as the oracles of Delphi, some in the nature of truisms, and some bold and explicit. They were all reduced to writing and delivered to Saluva, who was eagerly awaiting to receive them. He was overjoyed to find it would bring the fairest bride to the owner. He was particularly pleased to read that it would engender the feeling of love in the woman who might happen to possess it. The whole prediction pointed, in Saluva's mind, to a speedy consummation of the much-wished-for event. He, therefore, resolved to present the diamond to Padmini, the girl who had bravely withstood his importunities so long, in the hope that it might soon induce her to love, and to love him. Accordingly he lost no time in sending for the court jeweller and ordering him to set the diamond in gold, to be used as a pendant to a necklace of pearls. For that

same necklace the finest pearls were selected from those sent by the Nayak chief of Madura, who owed allegiance to the Chandragiri ruler, the pearls forming part of his tribute. A safe and well-guarded room in the palace was set apart for the goldsmith, to which only he and his apprentice, a boy of twelve years of age, were admitted. It is the practice with almost every workman in India to have an apprentice under him to be practically trained in the work. The apprentice, for learning the work, has to perform various duties to his master in the way of attending to his daily wants, one of which is to have ready always a sufficient quantity of a leaf called the *betel* and a nut called the *areca*, prepared in a particular manner, and hand them over to him to chew after meals. These are invariably and extensively used by the Hindus: the rich men and wealthy landlords engage men solely for this work, and these servants always accompany their masters with horn-like receptacles made of gold or silver hanging from their necks and containing a sufficient quantity of these chew-materials, while the poor always carry pouches with enough of them for constant use.

The workman and his apprentice were soon at work. The socket of gold to fix the stone in was made first. The foil was then prepared from a thin silver sheet well burnished and inserted in the socket, so that the diamond set over it might shine better, and the most suitable background colour was given all round inside the socket, also to add brilliance to the stone. Ultimately the socket so prepared was fixed with wax to the end of a small stick ; then commenced the most difficult part of the jeweller's work, when he had to bestow his best skill. It consisted in the setting of the diamond in the socket. One day, at noon, after his mid-day meal, the jeweller commenced this work. The diamond was fixed in various positions, and each position was closely examined. The workman first fixed it in a certain position, held the stick at a distance, and closely observed how far the diamond glittered in that position. Afterwards he altered that position and fixed it in another and saw how it shone there. In this manner he tried various positions, and closely observed how each affected the shining capacity of the gem. His whole attention was thus fully

occupied with these experimental trials ; and when each trial was made, and the stick held with the left hand at a distance for close observation, the jeweller stretched his right hand to the boy-apprentice behind to receive the *betel*.

Saluva, who was extremely anxious about the workmanship of the jewel, happened to peep in just at this juncture, after his mid-day meal, accompanied only by his personal attendant. The jeweller was working with his back to the door and, therefore, he did not notice the coming in of his master, who, finding that the workman's whole attention was at his work, entered the room with slow, measured steps. The workman, after fixing the stone in a particular manner, held his right hand as usual to the boy behind, who, seeing Saluva, drew aside ; and Saluva, unwilling that the work should be interfered with and perhaps spoiled, himself handed the leaf just then given to him to chew by his own personal attendant.

The jeweller received it and used it, when lo ! he felt a peculiar flavour and a very agreeable smell, by reason of the *betel* leaf

being of a superior kind and by its being spiced with valuable ingredients. He immediately turned round and saw bursting upon him in stern reality what he could never dream of happening. Straightway he fell at his master's feet and implored his pardon. With tears in his eyes he begged hard to be saved from this most heinous offence which he was unwittingly led to commit.

Saluva replied: "No, my faithful man. I am sorry for having drawn your attention away at the most critical stage of the work. I did not wish you should be interfered with, and so I handed the *betel* myself. My interference, I hope, has not caused any defect in the work, to injure your reputation as the most skilful workman in my kingdom."

So saying, he left after complimenting the jeweller for the care and trouble he was bestowing on that most important work. The most favourable position was soon determined. The stone was firmly fixed in the socket with thin sheets of gold, and the work duly finished within the stipulated time.

Such the little incident that took place while

the jewel was being made, and it appeared as if one part of the astrologer's prediction had come to pass already, in that Saluva became a servant of his own servant, whether by a curious coincidence or by the influences which precious stones are said to possess, which the astrologer predicted. I leave this to each of my readers to form his own individual opinion. But such is human nature, that whatever is agreeable to its feelings impresses it more than what is disagreeable; the latter is soon forgotten, while the other is never effaced from memory; and, in this particular instance, Saluva forgot the meaning of this incident in the light of the astrologer's prediction. His whole thought was occupied with what seemed to him the principal part of the prediction, that the diamond would engender love in the woman who became possessed of it. It was but one step more to construe it into love for him, and him alone.

In five days the work was completed. The jeweller succeeded in doing his work well, so much so that the diamond glittered in its new place better than before. An additional charm was thus given to it, and the necklace of pearls

became the costliest jewel in the land. Saluva received it and sent it to Padmini for her acceptance. Contrary to all expectation she accepted it, although, a few years before, when rich jewels were sent to her to her village by Saluva through his emissaries, she refused them, much to the surprise, and even regret, of her poor parents. Now the reason of her accepting it was that she, as a Hindu woman, considered it inauspicious to spurn the gift, wherein it was believed the goddess of wealth resided, and which came to her to make her happy. She had heard so much of the magic stone that she could not resist the temptation. But this was not Saluva's view. He thought that the diamond which he had become possessed of influenced his star and that the matter had taken a turn in his favour because Padmini accepted it. He considered their marriage was now only a question of days. He was, therefore, immensely pleased with Padmini accepting the gift, and he already concluded in his mind that his attempts for the fulfilment of his long-cherished desire were now beginning to bear fruit.

So Padmini received the necklace of pearls

with the diamond pendant. Now for the first time love slowly took shape in her. The numerous ballads sung celebrating Chennapa's prowess, bravery, and self-denial, the story of his so miraculously bringing the magnificent diamond from the invincible chief within a short time, so mysteriously influenced the impressionable, honest, and brave Indian girl that she began to love the hero of those ballads, although she had not seen him. The fact, also, of Chennapa being born like herself of obscure villagers, with no wealth, birth, or power, influenced her in his favour. Chennapa's fearless achievement and the receiving of the jewel by Padmini being within a few days of each other, it might with correctness be said that the beginnings of love in her synchronised with the gift of the jewel from Saluva, and it seemed as if here, also, the astrologer's prediction came to be fulfilled.

CHAPTER X

AN EXCITING SCENE

WRESTLING is an ancient art. In the days of Indian rulers this part of athletics was carried to perfection, and there were rules connected with it which were understood throughout the country. The best wrestlers had valuable rewards given them, not only by their own rulers, but also by rulers of other places. High feats in wrestling were witnessed, not by the king alone, but always by thousands in open amphitheatres specially constructed for the purpose, and even by the royal ladies, who had separate places allotted to them screened from public gaze.

One day a famous wrestler from the north came to Chandragiri and requested Saluva to permit him to show his skill before him. He said : “ Mighty king ! your name is familiar to us in distant lands as that of a great ruler who encourages all manly arts, and much have I heard of this ancient and glorious kingdom,

I have, therefore, come here to wrestle with the best in your land. These golden armlets set with rubies, diamonds, and emeralds I have gained by my feats. From every court to which I went I returned victorious. I was never beaten. If I succeed here I expect rich presents from you to go loaded with honours to my country ; but if I fail, these armlets I forfeit."

Not one of Saluva's men dared to accept the challenge, for the news of the wrestler's great skill and strength had preceded him. Grieved at the want of courage shown by his men, Saluva asked Chennapa, in whose courage and ability he had the highest confidence, to accept the challenge and save him from the situation.

The youth most loyally accepted the call. The day was fixed. Notices were sent to the court nobles and the public at large. At the hour appointed the amphitheatre was filled with men, who came even from distant parts. The great crowd was anxiously expecting to see the famous wrestler trying his skill with their most popular hero, the hero of their ballads and familiar songs. There were

present, also, the good Queen Ambiga and all the ladies of the royal household, as also Padmini, who accompanied her mistress.

Now was an opportunity afforded her to see Chennapa, whose praise was in everyone's mouth. The champion wrestler of the north came to the open space in the middle. His assistants stripped him of his paraphernalia, which was rather cumbersome, consisting of rich cashmere shawls, costly jewels, and laced clothes. When this was done there was exhibited in full before the great assembly a figure that seemed made specially for wrestling—a figure worthy to be looked at not merely as a whole; every limb, every part of the body was deserving of study and admiration; the features were well-formed and proportionate: while the young hero, who came to the centre, was a slim figure, delicately made; the features were not massive, but the figure and face were too beautiful for a wrestler. In those days even princes and nobles entered the lists as wrestlers, and did not consider it derogatory to try their skill • with professional men.

The audience, while it admired the one,

pitied the other; and the ladies especially. Their sympathies for the youth were aroused, for they already concluded that the young man must die in a few short moments at the hands of the champion wrestler.

The time came, the contending wrestlers met, and, at a given signal, as if by the law of gravitation, the two bodies met—one lost in the other. They whirled round and round for a time. The slim features of the one were lost in the massive features of the other, and for a time the former even became imperceptible. At last they stopped for a few minutes motionless, still in each other's grip, each cogitating as to how best to send the other to the ground. While thus cogitating, they drew breath. The audience gazed in breathless fear, and there was at least one soul there that silently sent a prayer to heaven to save the unfortunate youth from his dangerous position.

That youth stood motionless, like a statue, while in the grip of the other, who was making various motions of the head to find out the best way of laying his adversary low. Suddenly, unobserved by the innumerable

anxious observers, the youth performed, within the twinkling of an eye, a feat which sent the champion wrestler to the ground on his back. The burly body fell like some heavy matter with a loud noise. Straightway Chennapa buried his knees on the wrestler's broad chest. All this was the work of one minute. It was like the sleight-of-hand trick of a practised juggler.

Soon there arose a shout from the assembly all round, congratulating the victor, and, from that part of the amphitheatre where the ladies were seated, were showered flowers, shawls of exquisite workmanship, which the ladies wore, and with these fell a pearl necklace right on the victor, which everyone, including Saluva, knew was the jewel presented by him to Padmini.

That honest, impressionable maiden had only heard of the hero of the popular songs, but now she saw him with her own eyes and witnessed his extraordinary feat, which suddenly increased her love for him, and culminated in this open avowal. The sudden
• outburst of feeling shown in such an unmistakable manner by the assembly, the throw-

ing of rich shawls, which came thick and fast like a thousand flowers from a thousand hands, infected Padmini. She went a step further, and took out the most valuable of what she possessed and threw it on the victor, for in her case there was combined with the feeling of joy at Chennapa's success a higher feeling—deep love for him. She cared not for the consequences of her fearless action, for she openly wished to show that there was no use in Saluva continuing his attentions to her, and that she had set her heart upon the young man, who had no shady past, no record of past sins, to sully his name.

Saluva read his doom. The pang was sudden and sharp. It was keener; for, during all this time that Saluva had paid his attentions to Padmini, there was the bare refusal to reciprocate his love. But now it was made clear, in as open a manner as possible, that there was a man whom she actually loved—and loved to such an extent as to forego for him the costliest jewel in all that wealthy town. As soon as he was able to recover from the shock Saluva rose from his seat and retired to the palace crestfallen,

and perhaps vowing vengeance against the woman who thus dared to slight him, and the man who had become now the object of her attachment. Now joy was turned into sorrow and love into hate : joy, that one belonging to his court had routed the champion wrestler of all India ; sorrow, because the woman to whom he had so assiduously paid his attentions, and whom he fondly hoped to win in the end, showed, in an unmistakable manner, her love for that one belonging to his court who, but a few years ago, was an obscure villager, whom he had raised to his present enviable position. The woman he loved most before became now the object of his intense hatred.

The people well knew of Saluva's temperament. They had had experiences of it when the young minstrel was pierced with a dagger and their dear king done to death mysteriously ; so, they were expecting, every moment, a cruel mandate from the palace touching the unoffending Chennapa and the brave but unfortunate village girl.

Nor were these two unapprehensive of danger. Padmini disappeared from the palace that very night. The news of Padmini's dis-

appearance affected Chennapa, for, though he had not seen her face to face, he had learnt much of her beauty and accomplishments and the interesting story of her coming to live in Chandragiri in the royal palace as a maid of honour to the Princess Ambiga. It gratified him immensely that the woman, of whose courage and beauty he had learnt so much, thus openly manifested her love for him ; and the fact of her disappearance, as well as of the various rumours he heard regarding his own fate, impelled him to leave Chandragiri as quickly as possible and flee from the wrath of the cruel tyrant.

He travelled day and night alone. One night, wearied and hungry, he halted at a large village, and slept soundly. There he had a dream, and he heard a voice say : "Here shalt thou stay. Thou shalt be the ruler of this place, and the men around shall acknowledge thee as such. Here shalt thou perform deeds that shall make thy name great in history." Next morning, when he woke up, he found the place had a scenery that not all the hand of man could make more soul-inspiring and heart-stirring, and a people

whom not all the care of a wise monarch could make more contented and happy. The wild and rich beauty of nature around the village, not unlike that with which he was familiar in Chandragiri, pleased him, and he was rejoiced to find that it was strongly situated by nature, and that, with a little tact and energy, he could successfully keep Salūva and his army at bay.

In the morning, when he rose, he saw the villagers publicly discussing local affairs and suggesting ways and means for averting an impending catastrophe. Their late chief had died recently, leaving an only child. The times were turbulent. There was a strong rumour, almost amounting to certainty, that a chief, ruling at a place fifteen miles distant and well known for his cruelty and fiery nature, was intending to pounce upon the village and proclaim himself its ruler; and having seen the stranger whose appearance and demeanour struck them as remarkable, the people with one accord requested him to be their protector. In those days, when religion and sentiment ruled the passions of the people in a greater degree, and guided

their actions, this sudden appearance of one who impressed them favourably, just at the time when they were thinking of getting a ruler to protect them from coming serious troubles, was construed by them as the act of a higher power, which they must inevitably accept. A long series of wars, daily pillages, and murders, made the people timid. By long existing conditions they became confirmed in the belief of their forefathers that this world is but a fleeting shadow, where there is nothing of reality, nothing tangible, which they can grasp as their own; where the best thing to be done with the existing opportunities is by undergoing long and enduring sufferings, to prevent future births into this world and consequently future sorrows and troubles, and attain eternal beatitude after life. Thus it was that people in those days were able to adapt themselves to any state of circumstances and accept the inevitable. Such was the state of society when Chennapa entered upon his new career, and such the beauty and grandeur of the place,—a place worthy of some great event to live permanently in human records.

CHAPTER XI

CHINGLEPUT—"ANOTHER MODERN TROY"

THE ancient village where Chennapa tarried for the night, and of which he became the new chief at the request of its leading inhabitants, was, and is even now, called Chingleput. The young man began his new career at this new place with good results. As days rolled on, and wild beasts were destroyed by him, people boldly ventured out and reclaimed more lands. Peace and plenty reigned everywhere. Many troublesome leaders, who with a number of followers constantly harried the people, were subjugated, and security to life and property was secured. Many villages joined the new chief; the people willingly placed themselves under his sceptre. Chennapa was deeply religious, and he took care to perform his daily duties as enjoined by the sacred writings of the Hindu religion. His first attempt at making the people of Chingleput God-fearing consisted in building

a temple dedicated to Vishnu, the preserving power of the Hindu Trinity. Accordingly a temple of dressed granite, consisting of carved pillars and porches, was raised.* Near this temple was soon constructed a building in the form of a car, which is even at the present time carefully preserved. It has five storeys, and is about ninety feet high. This was built to enable Chennapa to get to the top every day—after the mid-day worship in the great temple of the ancient town of Conjeeveram, twenty miles distant, was performed—to see its high towers, visible from there, and to raise his hands aloft in supplication to the presiding deity in that temple. His manner of knowing at Chingleput, in the course of a few minutes, that the mid-day worship was performed at Conjeeveram was in this wise: five strong buildings, one at every fourth mile, in the form of circular pillars, with space on the top to house two or three persons, were erected. Each pillar was twenty feet high, and a staircase was

* With the permission of the East India Company this temple was removed by a great-grandfather of the author and erected in the town outside the fort. Two inscriptions on the walls show that this was done in A.D. 1813.

erected within. The persons at the top of each pillar were ready at their posts with big drums at the usual time, and as soon as the big conch shell was blown in the temple, intimating that the mid-day worship was performed, the men on the first pillar took it up by beating the drums. The next pillar did the same, and in this way the news was transmitted to Chingleput in an incredibly short time. Around the new temple and the car-like building rose the palace for the chief to live in, and residences for his principal officers: the treasurer, the accountant, courtiers, poets, astrologers, and so on. These were surrounded by a deep ditch. The fort thus constituted, about four furlongs long and three broad, was surrounded by a huge lake on the east about six miles in circumference; by the town proper on the south, wherein lived cultivators, merchants and others, who now flocked to it in great numbers on account of the safety it gave to person and property; and by vast plains on the north and west which were converted into rich cultivatable fields. Surrounding all these again—namely, the town, the lake, and cultivable fields—were hills, and

farther on was the River Palar winding around. The poet had these in view when he wrote :

“It was by far the loveliest scene in Ind :
A deep sunk lovely vale, 'tween verdant hills,
That, in eternal friendship, seemed to hold,
Communion with the changing skies above ;
Dark shady groves, the haunts of shepherd boys,
And wearied peasants in the mid-day noon ;
A lake, that shone in lustre clear and bright,
Like a pure Indian diamond set amidst
Green emeralds, where every morn, with songs
Of parted lovers, that tempted blooming maids,
With pitchers on their heads, to stay and hear
Those songs, the busy villagers of the vale
Their green fields watered, that gave them sure hopes
Of future plenty and of future joys.”

Thus what was a large village before became a town under the wise rule of the new chief. Trade increased, caravans were seen every day wending their way into the town in hundreds bringing the products of other countries into its ready marts. Many are the spots still shown in this historical place where deeds of courage were performed in defence of the cattle carried away by tigers and other wild beasts. There is now a village called the *Tiger Village*, a mile from the fort, where the

new chief killed a ferocious tiger, single-handed. Many were the deeds of valour done by him in defence of the weak and the helpless, which drew him nearer to their hearts and confirmed them in their belief that he was sent by Providence to rule them. One instance will suffice.

It happened one day that the court gymnast, who was Chennapa's instructor, met a poor but beautiful woman, taking, on her head, the mid-day meal of her husband, a labourer in the fields outside the town. Having met her in a sequestered spot he made overtures to her, but the chaste woman resented these overtures and importuned him not to meddle with her. The man told her that he was the chief's instructor in gymnastics, that on that very night he would go to her house, and that, if she still persisted in refusing to comply with his request, he would go the length of killing her husband and having his desire satisfied by force if need be. The ruler, he said, would do nothing to him, even if the matter became public. With this threat he went away, telling her to be ready to receive him that night.

The poor, ignorant woman went to her

husband, gave him the food, and returned home without telling him of what had happened, sadly brooding over the coming catastrophe. In the evening the husband returned home after his day's labour, ate his evening meal, and retired to bed. When the night was advanced the terror-struck woman, who could not sleep, sat at her cottage door crying over the impending calamity and invoking the assistance of the new ruler, who was their lord, their protector, their father, their everything, or any one of his night watchmen who might chance to pass by.

Chennapa, with whom it was a practice to go out through the streets of the town at midnight in the garb of a night watchman, chanced to hear this midnight wail proceeding from a woman at a distance, ran to her and asked her what her complaint was. Having heard her story he promised her protection, assuring her that he would even arrest the culprit and get him severely punished if he should intrude into her cottage that night.

She replied: "You are powerless. You are only a poor watchman, and he is our ruler's favourite instructor."

"A humble watchman though I may be," answered he, "I care not even for the chief in a matter of this kind. I am bound to protect the weak against the strong, in the cause of truth and righteousness. Fear not. But what will you give me for sitting here all night and guarding your cottage to uphold your honour?"

"I have only these few handfuls of grain for our morrow's meal," she said in return; "take them if you will, but only guard me that I may preserve my chastity."

Then the disguised watchman took the grain, safely tied it in his cloth, and waited at the house opposite.

At midnight the bully came, making a loud noise and blustering, kicked down the cottage door made of wicker, and asked the woman if she was ready to receive him. Out stepped the watchman from the house opposite and called on the intruder to surrender to him.

The gymnast grew angry, and said: "How dare you interfere with me in this uncere-
monious manner. Am I not your master's,
your ruler's, instructor? Run away at once.
If not, your life is in danger."

The watchman replied : “ I care not for your pupil, ruler though he may be ; I have my duty to perform. I say to you : ‘ Run away. If not, your life is in danger at my hands.’ ”

This bold reply from the watchman enraged the athlete, who, approaching, dealt him severe blows with a stick. The watchman, being himself a practised gymnast, and conversant also with the mode of the attack of his master, warded off the first three blows with his stick, for a disciple is bound not to assume the offensive against his own master, and is enjoined to give him three chances before he does so. This was done. The disguised watchman parried the fourth blow, and straightway felled his master dead to the ground, and went away to the palace.

The next morning the death of Chennapa’s favourite instructor became known to the whole town, and the people ran to the palace to know what the matter was. Before the chief and his assembly the chaste woman was produced, and she narrated the incident as it happened the previous night, and stated that it was the doing of the watchman whose turn it was to guard the place where her

cottage was situated. No one came forward as the author of the bold deed, and Chennapa revealed himself as the author of the previous night's performance, and he produced before his assembled people the grain he had taken from the woman to protect her. Then he preached a homily to the assembled men, saying that his government of them would be upon the foundations of truth and righteousness; that he existed for them and not they for him.

" His people's good he deemed his only care,
Their sorrows were his sorrows, and their joys
He counted as his own. . . . "

This incident raised him still more in the estimation of his people, and his just rule was the everyday talk of the country. One act of this nature had more effect upon a sentimental people than a thousand just decisions by public tribunals.

Such the good work of the newcomer, who, by his courage and by his just rule, gathered together a peaceful, happy, and contented people. He gave them solace and soothed their sorrows, made them law-abiding

and God-fearing; and such the place whose natural position he took advantage of and strengthened, after the model of Gingee, an impregnable place about fifty miles south of Chingleput. This Gingee was justly styled by the first English historian of India as "the Modern Troy." Thus Chingleput became "another Modern Troy."

CHAPTER XII

CHENGI—THE TATTOOER

CHENNAPA'S present position in life was a happy and even an enviable one. Belonging to poor parents in an obscure village he rose by his ability to be Saluva's personal attendant, then a courtier in his court, and, finally, the ruler of a petty state. He won the love and affection of his subjects by his wise and just rule. His name became a watchword for righteousness and justice. He was in constant dread of a sudden attack by Saluva. He knew what a tyrant that usurper of his sovereign's throne was; he knew how mercilessly that regicide would invent new tortures to put him to a slow, lingering death were he to fall into his hands. But he overcame all this difficulty by devoting his days and nights to the strengthening of his fort to enable it to withstand a long siege if need be. He succeeded in making his place secure from all possible dangers. He had many

important works of a strategic nature executed. Finally, he succeeded in making his fort as impregnable as that one in Gingee, said to be the strongest in Southern India.

There was still another thought ever present to his mind: a difficulty which he had no means of overcoming. It was concerning Padmini, of whose beauty and courage in successfully opposing Saluva's overtures he had heard so much; of whose daring act in throwing the necklace of pearls on him, regardless of consequences, when he successfully wrestled with the champion wrestler of the north, he was personally aware. He had never seen her. There was, therefore, no chance of his ever identifying and recognising her. The only chance lay in the girl herself, who had seen him but once on that memorable occasion, seeking him in his new place of safety. She disappeared from Chandragiri a short time before he ran away from that place. How was she to know his present whereabouts? Besides this, she was a woman, and it was almost an impossibility in those days for her to venture out amidst the dangers surrounding a person of the weaker sex. If

one day they met, it would be only through the agency of some higher power. Such were his reflections.

One great work which he undertook in his new place was the deepening and the enlarging of the lake already referred to. He desired that it should extend to the very base of the hills surrounding it, that its waters should beat upon the walls which nature had made to prevent them from flowing out. Precautions were taken to divert into the lake every drop of water falling upon the hills during the rainy season.

One day when he was superintending this work, he saw a strange figure descending from the hills, singing a crude song. As soon as the voice of that figure was heard there was a flutter amongst the workmen, for that figure was to them well known and that voice familiar. It was a female figure that descended from the hills—a tattooer, who was well known in those parts, not merely as an accomplished tattooer, but also as a sooth-sayer. She was eagerly sought after by the
• poor. She was welcomed at the courts of princes, and in the innermost apartments of

palaces, which were forbidden places to all but the rulers themselves, the princesses courted her aid. She was universally respected, for her prophecies had all come to pass. She was, the people thought, a gifted woman, one who, by God's grace, had been able to read the hearts of men and to read into the future.

When she came down she came singing towards the place where the new chief of Chingleput was seated. There was a bustle among the men working there. A sort of passion and activity seemed to have been imported into the camp which was, till then, lifeless. The working men were all attention. There was an eager catching of the words that came from her lips, for they meant more than what they ordinarily conveyed—words pregnant with what the future would be—words also mysterious, which could be understood only by those who knew her well. Her paraphernalia was of the most peculiar kind. She had a cloth of variegated colours, eight yards in length and one-and-a-half broad tied round her waist, and loosely and gracefully • thrown round her body and over her shoulders,

and a jacket of bright colour that covered her breast. She had bracelets ornamenting her hands, and making a jingling noise as she danced and sang; also wristlets of silver, toe-rings, finger-rings, and ear-rings. She had a black cane with a silver wire twisted round, a basket with some liquid, needles, and other implements of her trade. Her appearance was in every way unique. When she came down singing, her whole body was moving to and fro. Her words suited themselves to the action. Her arms and face were tattooed over with quaint figures. There was a peculiarity in her body with a history of its own. It showed that her early life was a little romance. It gave her her peculiar sanctity, and raised her in the estimation of her kinsmen and kinswomen. It changed for ever her position as a woman companioned with a man in this world, and fixed her future condition in life. Chengi, for that was her name, and her husband were a loving pair. She was counted as the most beautiful woman among her people. Years ago a charge of want of chastity was brought against her. The husband did not believe the charge

for he well knew she was faithful to him and that she was a woman of spotless character ; but the people to whom they belonged had their own code of morals, their own rules of society to guide them in their daily lives, and any imputation against character required to be publicly cleared before a meeting of the clan, before the person whose character was questioned could claim association with members of that clan. Accordingly a meeting of the members, both male and female, of their clan was held. They repaired to a grove under a hill, where, it is said, their hill goddess resided, and performed worship, which consisted in an offering to the deity of millet, boiled with honey, and clarified butter. The fire was kindled, the pot containing the millet was set on the fire, clarified butter was poured in in time, and, at a signal given by the head of the clan, when the pot began to simmer, the accused woman issued forth from a little enclosure covered over with leaves and put up there for the occasion. She came naked ; her long hair let loose was the only covering she had. She came direct to the boiling pot, in the presence of the assembled clan, poured the

honey into it, and, pronouncing her innocence thrice in the name of the goddess, used her right arm instead of the ladle, and stirred the boiling millet in the pot thrice. This done she ran back to the enclosure, and the boiled millet was distributed among the men and women. Her innocence was thus proved. The scalded arm, it was said, was miraculously cured in a short time; hence it was that her right arm, to the very tips of her fingers, had a more dusky appearance than the rest of her body. This the peculiarity in her body, and this the history connected with it. Her husband, after this ordeal, gladly undertook to take her back, but she refused; and from that day of her life she became a soothsayer. The common report about her was that all her prophecies came to pass. They were delivered not in the plain, ordinary language of men, but in verse, full of enigmas, which were said to have deeper meanings than what appeared on the surface of her utterances. Such was the woman that descended from the hills on that day and appeared before Chennapa and his men singing a song which ran thus, and which was evidently addressed to the chief:

“Trust in the Lord, O little man !
To make this lake a little sea,
T’ enchain it ’tween these verdant hills,
Thou toilest hard, but oh ! the dew,
That sleeps upon the tiny leaf,
The leaf upon the tallest branch,
It is a sea ; it is a sea.

And where are its environments ?

Trust in the Lord, O little man !
That sea, that slumbers cradled in
The farthest little leaf, runs not
From its appointed place, but sleeps
Within the little space ordained,
Unconscious of its narrow bounds,
And careless of the gentle breeze
That rocks the cradle to and fro.

Trust in the Lord, O little man !
The mighty ocean made by Him
To warn man of his littleness,
Where are its great and mighty walls ?
Doth it from its appointed bounds,
To drown man’s habitations, flow,
Though angry storms may rage and doth
It not stand still by His commands ?

And wherefore didst thou deem the fates
Are hard ’gainst thee and Padmini ;
She, who loved thee so deep and true,
Who threw the jewel fair, shall meet,
Yes, meet the youth she boldly chose,
For nothing in this world is hard,
When love is pure and hearts are brave.

Trust in the Lord, O little man !

Thus singing, she came down dancing and

waving her black enchanted cane. At the close of the song her emotions became more violent. She worked herself up to a state of frenzy when she touched upon Chennapa's love for Padmini. Her allusion to this matter impressed the youth very deeply, and the veneration and awe with which she was treated by his workmen induced similar feelings in him also. No one there knew the secret of his love for Padmini, and how could this woman have known it? To nobody did he reveal it. While he was meditating as to how she could have known this secret, the woman requested him to stretch out his arm for her to imprint his lady's name thereon. Chennapa did as was desired, and the tattooer took out a thin reed from her basket, and, dipping it in a black preparation which she had, made a sketch on the arm of the four characters in Tamil, that being the language of the land, forming the word Padmini. Then she took a number of needles, and with them began to prick the arm upon the lines of the sketch previously made. Chennapa would have withdrawn his arm, on account of the excruciating pain caused to him by the opera-

tion, but the awe and respect in which he held her, and the prophetic song she sang when the operation was going on, made him forget the pain altogether. She sang :

“Upon this stony rock, on this rough soil,
Thy hand I hold, thy lady's name to print ;
The name, imprinted ever in thy heart,
I print in letters imperishable,
For her to gaze in joy, when, with thine own,
Her arm in friendship plays, and to admire,
When comes the time, the beauties of my work,
For she shall soon be thine—she shall be thine.

She left her home to seek, in climes unknown,
The noble youth she loved and boldly chose ;
And wealth and power for his sake she spurned.
Alone barefooted she walks day and night,
Her tender limbs feel not the daily toil.
But doth she know the pain thou bearest now,
For her dear name to shine upon thy arm ?
Fear not, she shall be thine, she shall be thine.

Now hearken to the truth of this my song.
What He then wrote, when, in thy mother's womb,
He planted thee, He never shall wipe out,
Nor write anew, though heavens fall, and earth
Sinks down, and though the sun and moon stand still.
'Tis written she should soon be linked to thee,
And though true love ne'er doth run smooth at first
She shall be thine, for ever shall be thine.

Despair not then, my son ! for soon the time
Shall come, when helpless and without a friend,
She shall trace thee by this my handiwork,
And shall descry her name upon thy arm.

A diamond rich shall be thy gift to her,
The diamond on the jewel fair, by which
A mighty ruler wished her love t' enchain.
And soon she shall be thine—she shall be thine."

Thus ended her prophetic song—the song which, to Chennapa's surprise, gave out what had actually taken place. The interesting and the agreeable prophecy made him forget the pain of the operation.

The strange woman then took leave of him, saying: "Go now, my son! Thy lady's name shall in two days' time appear green and shine on thy arm for ever," and vanished away, again singing a song in her rough native dialect and in the metre peculiar to her clan, which has enchanted many a prince and many a cottager, in all ages, and in all parts of the country; and the highest and sublimest truths of the world, of philosophy and religion, and the most refined feelings that man is capable of possessing, clothed in this rough dialect of her clan, alive and refreshing, have impressed the people more than any other form with which they were clothed and expressed to the world.

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CHAPTER XIII

THE SAGE OF CHINGLEPUT

IN no other country in the world has it been more possible for man to do the highest good or the greatest evil under the guise of religion than in India. India is pre-eminently the land of religion. Whatever of romance and chivalry there is in our annals, of courage and self-denial, of love and sympathy, it is in the main due to religion. Under the garb of religion great states were acquired, beautiful women were won, monumental institutions, stupendous in size and difficult of organisation, were reared. Daring and thrilling adventures were performed in the name of religion by its votaries. Minds vexed and inconsolable sought shelter under it, and lived days of peace and quietness instead of storm and tempest. Rulers gave up their kingdoms, their wealth, and power, to go to the wilderness to spend their time in religious meditation, and beautiful princesses threw away their position and dignity to marry

the poorest of mankind for their austere piety and religious fervour. The history of religion in India teems with instances of such great denials and self-sacrifices. We read of men, born rich and with the highest of worldly acquisitions, leaving all these and consecrating their lives for the good of mankind, for the complete annihilation of self, for the attainment of eternal bliss. We read, also, of the ambitious and the capable temporarily assuming the cloak of religion, giving up, for the time being, all they had in the world, only to gain in the end more worldly renown and more riches. And do we not also read and hear of the most unscrupulous and the most depraved of human natures having recourse to the profession of religion as the easiest and the surest method of successfully hiding their true character and carrying out their objects? Professors of religion have always been honoured and listened to with respect. In this land, therefore, the *great man* who has no thought of the world, but who spends his days and nights in finding out ways and means to free • man from worldly misery and from life's trials and difficulties, is a familiar figure, and is as

indispensable to every village as the temple is to which the villagers go to offer their daily prayers. To serve man, and thereby serve God, are his great end and aim. He is the friend, guide, and philosopher of the village. A peculiar sanctity attaches to his doings and his mode of living.

One such there was in Chingleput at the time of our story. He was born of rich parents. When he was a boy it was his desire, which amounted to a passion, to spend his time in the society of those who had renounced the world, and whose whole life was spent in visiting sacred shrines and bathing in holy waters. Once he left his native village with a number of these men. He informed not his parents of his departure, and he was absent from home for a number of years. When he returned they married him to a fair and wealthy maiden, thereby intending to detain him at home. But even this inducement had no effect on him, and once more he left his native village. To many countries he went, many holy shrines he visited, and many sacred rivers he bathed in. At the feet of great teachers of religion he sat. After

a long absence he returned again to his village, but only with the intention of spending the remainder of his days in the place of his birth and dying where his forefathers had preceded him to the grave; and when thus he came, most of the men who had known him were gathered to their fathers.

A new generation had risen up, which did not know who he was, but gathered round him, attracted by his teachings. His wife one day formed one of a group of ardent admirers, and, by certain distinguishing marks, and chiefly by a large mole on his left cheek, suddenly identified him. Tears trickled down her eyes, because, after all, she had found her long-lost husband. The good man, who knew that it was his wife who was thus giving vent to her sorrow, tried to soothe her, and advised her to give up all thoughts of him. But the chaste, pure-hearted, and loving wife was inexorable.

She fell at his feet, and said: "It is your mission in this world to do good to mankind, better their lives, make their thoughts purer and their actions nobler, and to introduce goodwill and peace among them. Rightly or

wrongly, we were wedded to each other—were indissolubly linked; and what is the worth of all that mission in the world among men brought together in this universe?—what is the worth of all your great and noble teachings if to one so linked you should be the cause of pain and heartfelt grief? All the good you do to humanity by your teaching and by your example becomes of no use while I, your partner in life, live in misery. My prayer to you, therefore, is to permit me to be with you while I live; to minister to you wherever you are, in wild mountains or in lone caves.”

This appeal of the good wife had touched his heart, and with her he lived on the outskirts of the village, ministering to the moral wants of the people, making them better fathers, better citizens, and nobler men.

Such was the sage of Chingleput and his good wife, that lived at the time of our story, in a simple hut made of rushes, with no aperture either for light or air. At the entrance, under a huge banyan-tree, over a raised earthen mound neatly plastered over with cowdung, sat the good man, always with a number of persons near him, to whom he

taught his religion. He attended also to the medical wants of the people. In his wanderings he had come across many holy men who knew the secret medicinal virtues of plants and herbs, and who taught him the use of those. He always had a store of valuable medicines with which he treated the sick, and effected remarkable cures. His wife looked after his needs, and they were few. He took only one meal a day, and that was in the mid-day. His fare was simple. His dress was of the ordinary kind, consisting of a piece of white cloth, three yards long and one-and-a-half broad, tied round his loins. He discarded the dress usually worn by holy men in the East. There was, therefore, nothing in him to distinguish him from other ordinary mortals. His abode was in a little valley, two miles from Chingleput, surrounded on three sides by hills and on the fourth by the River Palar. The way to his abode led through a narrow pass, and through it, almost every hour of the day, men and women passed to be benefited by his ministrations, both physical and spiritual. His teachings were clothed invariably in poetry, in the Tamil

language, a language peculiarly suited to the expression of higher thought and wisdom. That language has a music and rhythm which no other language is said to possess, and a poetic literature as rich and grand as any other in the world. The glory of Tamil literature consists not in its Ramayana and Mahabharata, the former of which, some maintain, excels even its original in Sanscrit ; not in the beauty and grandeur of its five great poems ; not in the Puranic poems, whose number is legion, wherein true poetry and Oriental exaggeration are strangely blended together ; no, not in all these, but in its grand ethical precepts, put in forms that Sappho might envy ; in rules of life for observance, aptly and felicitously expressed, that man may bear its joys and troubles nobly and well, and make that life worth living ; in songs wherein their authors have, from the inmost depths of their hearts, expressed their adoration to their Maker, sung of the fleeting nature of this life and of man's utter helplessness to grapple with life's higher problems ; songs full of piety and fervour, calculated to draw tears from natures the most unsentimental and prosaic ; and songs

full of sentiments that would satisfy not one creed or sect but please any system of thought or religion. Such the old man, good and true, and such the literature of the language through which he taught the people; and a visit to Chingleput in those days was not considered complete unless an opportunity was made to see and hear this grand old sage.

Chennapa had heard wonderful accounts of this religious teacher. He long had wanted to see him. But the strange visit of the tattooer, and her still stranger prophecy, impelled him to lose no time in carrying out his intention and finding solace and consolation in his trials and difficulties. To him the visit of the woman was a sort of vision, a dim ray of hope, a gleam of sunshine throughout the darkness of the considerable period of time which had elapsed since Padmini's disappearance from Chandragiri. During that period news about her was *nil*. No doubt he was a strong-minded youth, able to bear any amount of trouble and misery, but this visit moved him; it affected him deeply. This should not appear strange to those who know the susceptibilities of human nature.

The separation of a dear relation or friend is felt keenly by us, and, if that separation be kept alive in our memories every day, there is the everyday pang, the everyday mental anguish felt. But if, through some chance or accident, or owing to length of time or other causes, the pang is not so keen as at first, and we almost forget the separation; and if, subsequently, an event happens which suddenly recalls to mind all the associations connected with that separation, or gives hope of a possibility of meeting the lost one, the agony and the distress become greater and more acute. Exactly so with Chennapa. Of course, there was the everyday thought of Padmini; but this visit of the tattooer imparted an intensity to his feelings. Hence his hastening to visit the man, who, of all others, he thought, was the fittest and the worthiest before whom he could open his mind and lay bare his thoughts and feelings, without reserve, regarding the visit of the tattooer, to know from him authoritatively what it all meant.

The old man received Chennapa very cordially, and expressed his great satisfaction

at seeing him. The youth then narrated the story of his life: his humble parentage, his entering the service of the ruler of Chandragiri, his rise, and his fall on account of Padmini manifesting her love in an open and unequivocal manner, his disappearance from the place for fear of Saluva, who killed his own master and ruled in his stead, and his romantic assumption of the chieftainship of Chingleput, of which the sage was no doubt aware. All these he related in detail, not failing, also, to add the strange visit of the woman, which impressed him more than anything else in this new place and in his new sphere of life.

The sage attentively gave ear to the young man's story, and said: "Grieve not, my son! Your lot is the lot of many in this world. You and Padmini are friends cast together in this world. Your hearts are linked together by the sweet tie of love.

" 'Call it not chance the link that binds men's hearts,
But Heaven's sacred gift to sweeten life.'

"And what is life! Here, before us, is the great road, through which every hour, every minute, of the day, men pass and repass. We

see men passing from Benares in the north to Rameswaram in the south. It is used for short distances also, and all meet here, and some travel together, while others go alone. Men from villages on either side meet on this road and travel. Some travel together, and then separate, according to their destinations. Exactly so is man's life in this world. This world is one endless path of light and consciousness, where men meet and pass; some unconcerned go, while others travel with ties of friendship, fatherhood, motherhood, and brotherhood. Some go, leading lone lives, while others friendly lives lead, like sons and fathers and mothers and friends. On either side of this path of light and illumination there is darkness extending to eternity, where knowledge and memory fade away. And, here in this world, there is the eternal dropping in and out of lives; and, like the sun, that comes afresh in the morn and goes out at eve, or like the seasons eternal that come and go, man comes to this world and goes out of this existence, and knows not what he was before this existence or what he will be after. As when upon a dark night, at the smithy's

fire, sparks numberless are born and slowly go their way, and going, dimly brighten the dark space around, and die away into universal darkness; even so man is born, and leaves, when comes the time, the path of light and illumination. His life goes like the spark, fading gradually away from knowledge and consciousness. This life of light and illumination is the greatest blessing to man. We have our appointed duty to perform in this life, and we should do it honestly and well. No doubt, on the way, we may have to tread on pricks and thorns. Some leave wounds that never heal; the thorn enters deep, and becomes difficult to remove. In other cases, the wound is slight, and the journey is smooth and easy. Some receive numberless wounds, and many, few or none at all. But he that hath more than the ordinary share of the world's troubles and sorrow, of him more is expected. I would, therefore, ask you, my son, not to feel the hardships which you have to bear. Rejoice, on the other hand, that opportunity is given you to live the life of a true man. The good swimmer who without difficulty

reaches the shore does not attract our admiration so much as the other, who, unfortunately, caught in the dangerous flood, battles hard, and reaches the shore after great effort, nor the man who walks placidly on the even ground, so much as the man who falls into dangerous pits and tries hard to rise to the surface and continue his journey. Look on the two pictures. The latter is more interesting than the former. Man must care not for the difficulties and dangers that beset him in this world. He must battle hard. The difficulties must be so many and so great that he should have no breathing space. I have no respect for the Hindu king of old, who, finding that the head that wears a crown lies always uneasy, that there are no pleasures to enjoy, but only troubles and sorrows, sought relief in a desert, where he thought he might find rest. And when to the desert he went, he was pursued by a tiger. He ran to get down a well that had no water in it. Now that well had a huge banyan-tree over it, its hanging roots going down to the very bottom of the well. When, with the assistance of these hanging roots, he got down half way, he found

a big-hooded cobra lying down at the bottom. Accordingly he clung to the hanging roots of the banyan-tree, and was half way in the well, with the hissing, poisonous snake underneath and the devouring tiger above. In this predicament he saw a rat biting a honeycomb at the top of the hanging roots to which he clung. When a few drops of honey fell down, he, weary and worn, and careless of the danger above and below, tasted with joy the few welcome drops, and forgot, in that momentary pleasure, the dangers and difficulties by which he was surrounded. Such is life in this world, full of misery and trouble; and the man that endures these and nobly bears the burden, that is the true man. That man is the noblest creation of God."

"True, father, what you say," said Chennapa, "but I cannot understand why, in this world, the bad prosper and the good suffer. There is Saluva: he killed the poor youthful minstrel who pointed out the injustice of his act in dethroning his own king. That king he foully murdered subsequently. And now, at this moment, he is the most prosperous man, successfully ruling the vast kingdom

of the great Krishna Deva Raya. This is inexplicable."

"My son," replied the sage, "you do not know the mysterious rules by which this world of man is governed. Incongruities and inconsistencies there are. They seem to be so to our naked eyes. I shall cite a recent instance; one that happened but yesterday. A weary traveller came running from the burning plains to rest under the shade of this huge banyan-tree. After taking a little rest his eyes fell on that tall, slender palm-tree yonder with its clusters of fruits not unlike iron balls. He asked: 'What is this strange incongruity in nature? That tree there, which gives no shade, whose trunk is slender and whose leaves are few in number, yields fruit of the size of a man's head. But this stately banyan, a hundred times, nay, a thousand times, larger than that palm-tree, bears fruit disproportionate to its size. They are no bigger than the little balls with which the children play with their tiny fingers. What strange inconsistency in nature.' Just then, my son, a fruit fell from the tall palm-tree, making a heavy noise. 'Look there,' I said,

‘there is the explanation for your doubt. It is said of this stately banyan :

“That sages love to linger in its shades
And solitudes, the weary and the worn
Run from the burning plains around to rest,
The toiling cattle stretch their wearied limbs,
And countless birds find nightly shelter here.”

“What, then, would be the fate of me, of you, of the hundreds of men that find repose here and of the thousands of dumb cattle that court its cool shade, if it should yield fruits proportionate to its size? Why, every one of us must die. That palm-tree there yields no shade, and no one goes to rest there. Thus is love and kindness shown to living beings by benignant Nature. Nay, more, the innumerable fruits of the banyan afford food, for several months, to millions of birds—birds, that cannot, like man, toil hard and raise their food from the ground. Even so, there is no incongruity in evil prospering; bad men are brought into this world for our good. Evil is essential to society. Bad men are the salt of society. Their actions add flavour to the actions of the good. I welcome the news, whenever I hear a wrong done, and

never am I so glad as when I hear a great evil done, affecting not one or two persons, but thousands, nay millions, and done, not by any obscure man, but by the great and mighty in the land. Who knows but that this horrible deed of the cruel regicide of Chandragiri is meant as good for us? There is a well-meant design and a purpose in the great actions and the deeds we see committed, though, no doubt, to the naked eyes of many, they may at first sight appear incongruous and inconsistent, as you say. But wait till the world's plan is worked out, and there will come a time when you yourselves will find as clearly, as the man here yesterday, Saluva's action but a mere blessing in disguise to mankind."

"But what of this prophecy of the tattooer, my master? She said that Padmini and I are fated to be indissolubly linked together. But I know not where and how to find her. Show me a way and I will follow it."

The old man answered: "Those who toil with untiring energy will overcome even fate. Go, now, my son, to Chandragiri, in the garb of a holy man. Take some of my medicines,

which produce instantaneous cures of diseases from which men suffer long. Administer these to the sick of those parts, and I have no doubt you will come across Padmini, or she will find you out. This is the safest and the least harmful course I can recommend, for, in your attempt to find out your Padmini, you will have also opportunities to serve mankind and do good. Your person will be respected on account of the sacredness of the calling you assume, and no one will dare to touch a hair of your head. The holy man is the person least likely to rouse suspicions in our country, and you have no fear of discovery by Saluva or his men. Adieu, my son! The blessing of God be upon you."

So saying, the good old man gave him a good stock of his valuable medicines, and sent him away.

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CHAPTER XIV

THE TAKING OF THE BULL BY THE HORNS

CHIVALRY, as understood in Europe, flourished in former times in India among the Aryans. But the chivalry of Southern India, I mean the chivalry of the Dravidians, was different from that of the Aryans of Northern India, which was more akin to the chivalry of Europe. Nobility of action and purity of character, a regard for truth and a desire to maintain a high standard of life, a passionate worship of woman and a readiness to do everything for her, a desire to give succour to the weak, and, above all, an intense faith in God, all which underlay that grand institution in Europe and Northern India, also formed the main characteristics of the chivalry of Southern India. Amongst the nations of Europe and the Aryans of India glory in war formed the chief incentive to action. Amongst the Dravidians chivalry was founded not so much on courage shown in open battlefields and

public tournaments and on skill in handling instruments of war as on those shown in the gentler arts of peace and the everyday concerns of human life. Southern India is essentially an agricultural country, and the highest ambition of man there was to gain distinction as a successful tiller of the soil and a rearer of beautiful and valuable cattle. Dravidian poets have always sung of the manliness of the pursuit of agriculture and the rearing and protecting of cattle. Compared with these everything else was of secondary importance. The man who kept the most beautiful and the best trained bull was an object of admiration, and, still more, the man who was able to hold in his grip the horns of such an one. Such a man was sure to be loved by beautiful maidens, and not he that killed a tiger or a lion by the skilful use of his weapons. Our poets sang of God Krishna bringing within his strong embrace seven cows at a time, and thereby winning the love of shepherd girls. We also read of God Subramania captivated by the *Maid of the Hills*, who guarded her father's extensive millet fields, and who by the skilful use of

the sling scared away, for miles around, birds that came down to devour the grains. He that was able to get to the top of the *slippery pole*, smeared over with oil, and pluck the cocoanuts tied up there, was considered worthy of admiration, and so also he that with his boomerang brought down, from the tallest tree, a bunch of fruits. The victories of peace are no less renowned than those of war. Nay the skill and courage shown in the gentler arts of peace are greater than those shown in the wilder scenes of life, and chivalry conceived and built on the former is more noble in its purpose and more lasting and beneficial in its results than that built upon the latter. It is thus that we see flourishing, even to this day, such remnants of ancient South Indian chivalry as "the taking of the bull by the horns."

In a large village, which was under the sway of the chief of Chingleput, there lived a rich landholder. He was the headman of the village. He owned many bullocks, and one bull in particular amongst the many that were trained for the yearly shows. This bull, when young, was left to suck all the milk of his mother, and, being pure white in colour

and specially favoured, was richly fed. Thus he grew, and, in time, the horns protruded luxuriantly from his head. He was trained to such perfection that the strongest expert was not able to take hold of his horns or in any way bring him under physical control. Brave young men feared to go near him. His owner, the lord of the village, had a beautiful daughter; many suitors there were, rich and belonging to influential families, for the hand of this girl. There were so many offers that the father had difficulty in deciding the most eligible. Besides, if he selected one, in preference to another, inter-village dissensions were sure to arise, and consequent bloodshed also. He, therefore, decided to bestow the girl on him who was able to bring under control his famous bull, in the presence of his lord and master, the paramount chief of Chingleput. So the news went forth to all the villages, informing them of the coming event. The day was selected. The place was fixed in an open, broad plain, underneath a hill, by the side of the lake. A platform was erected for Chennapa and his party and the respectable portion of the visitors who came to witness the feat.

Early on the morning of the day fixed for this public exhibition thousands of people were seen wending their way towards the town. It was an endless stream of men, women, and children in holiday attire. There were seen rich men going on their bullocks, women in closed palanquins, the court servants in their rich dresses, the astrologer, the master of the army, ministers, Brahmin priests, and last, but not least, the young chief himself with his trusty bodyguard. All these came and took their appointed places.

In this vast motley crowd there was an interesting group, which attracted the attention of the people assembled on that day on account of the novelty and the importance of the mission on which it was engaged. Its central figure was an Englishman, whose bearing was at once proud and dignified. He had a numerous guard armed with bows and arrows and swords and shields. That Englishman was Mr Francis Day, first member of Council of the English settlement at Armaghham, sixty-five miles to the north of Madras, on the coast of Coromandel. Here the English traders encountered many serious difficulties. The

Dutch, who had already established a factory at Pulicat, twenty miles south, and carried on a successful trade in spices, made matters hot for the English. The Dutch were more powerful. Matters came to a crisis, and the English wished to obtain a strip of land and erect a strong fort, to defend themselves in case of hostilities, at a place where they could not only carry on their trade unhampered, but also command the assistance more easily of another European nation—namely, the Portuguese. With this object, Mr Day was sent to treat with the young chief of Chingleput, news of whose wise and beneficent rule travelled even as far north as Armaghham, for obtaining a suitable site for a fort, and getting through him the final sanction for the site from the sovereign lord, the ruler of Chandragiri.

Still another circumstance that made this visit of the stranger and his numerous suite interesting to the people was the prophecy of the chief's astrologer. When Mr Day was received a few days before, in open assembly, and when he delivered the message which he was commissioned to place before the young chief of Chingleput, the astrologer is reported

to have said: "Deny them not this request. The bird is outside the gate, asking for shelter. It is destined soon to come inside into the central hall of the house and to become master of it, and to eat and drink of the best things therein, and the glory and honour will be yours among future generations, that you first gave the shelter to the future lords of the country." Thus it was that the thousands who were gathered together in that historical place on that day felt a greater interest in the Englishman and his party than in the coming event of the taking of the bull by the horns and the eventual selection of a husband for the beautiful daughter of the village laird.

For the length of about a quarter of a mile a sort of rude platform was raised on both sides, with a space of about forty feet left in the middle right through, while, exactly in the middle, a detour was made—curve inside—on both sides. It looked like a large amphitheatre. Here was the more respectable portion of the assembly. Here, also, were the Hindu ladies, screened from public view, amongst whom was the daughter of the village headman. On the hill behind the platform

was a huge crowd of men swarming there like bees. They came there long before the appointed hour and secured what each considered a vantage ground on the hill, to see clearly what was going on below.

The herald of Chennapa then stepped forward before the vast assembly and began the proceedings by pronouncing in a loud tone the usual expressions, indicating the chief's greatness and power and his virtues. They ran in words like the following:—"Let there be silence. The mighty lord of the universe is sitting in state here. The king of kings, before whose feet mighty rulers bow their heads; whose feet are touched by the glittering crowns of monarchs. The king of kings, who never bows his head except when he worships the great Preserver of the Universe or stoops down to kiss fair maidens. The king of kings, whose virtues shine like those of Sri Rama. Hear ye all assembled here. His Majesty has come here to bestow the fair daughter of his trusty vassal, the loyal laird seated here, upon him who will boldly face the wild bull and bring him under his control. Hear ye, also, whom it concerns, that

bulls will come this way, and those that will take hold of them by the horns will get guerdons from the hands of His Majesty ; and the guerdon for stopping the famous bull, and holding him still, is the fair maiden who shines like the moon among the stars, whose face puts to shame the beautiful lotus, whose eyes are like those of the fishes of the sea, and whose hair rolls like the waves of the ocean." After he finished saying this a signal was given, and the bulls came one after another. They were let loose at one end of the platforms, and came running madly through the street-like space left between the two platforms, and just when they reached the amphitheatre in the centre out stepped bold youths to hold them in their grip. Those who were successful received the applause of the crowd and the reward for their valour, while the unsuccessful were sorely vexed with their failures. But two there were in the amphitheatre who were looking on at these displays unconcernedly and exhibiting not the slightest sign of their feelings on the occasion. Their thoughts were intent on the bull to be encountered soon and the fair maiden they

were destined to win or lose on that day, for these were the only two youths of respectable families that claimed the hand of the girl. That bull came at last, the bull by conquering which the fair maiden was going to be won. From one of his horns dangled down a beautiful chain made of shining gold, the gift of the father, which was to adorn the wrist of the successful youth. On the bull came, running madly, striking terror into the hearts of the bystanders. The whole audience was anxiously watching his career, for now was going to happen the last scene of the stirring ceremony. When the bull reached the amphitheatre one of the two youths boldly went near and attempted to grasp the horns; but no, the strong and carefully-trained beast would not allow it. With a shake of the head he threw the youth down. The other young suitor, now glad that his prize was assured, ran near to take hold of the horns, but, in the anxiety of the moment, he lost his hold. Nothing daunted, he threw his powerful sinewy arms around the neck of the animal, to bring him down under his control, but in the twinkling of an eye the youth was down on the

ground, and the exasperated bull was ramming his head against the helpless youth, amidst the yells and the shouts of the crowd. The young man, without losing his presence of mind, moved not a limb, but lay there like a dead corpse, and the bull, leaving him for dead, ran away right through the confused crowd and disappeared on the hills, the chain of gold still shining on one of his horns. Thus ended the day's proceedings. No decision was arrived at regarding the choice of a husband, owing to the failure of both the suitors to successfully perform the feat they came forward to accomplish. A few days after this event Mr Day took leave of the young chief of Chingleput, with assurances of friendship and words of encouragement which boded the eventual fulfilment of the object of his mission.

CHAPTER XV

A PERILOUS FEAT

EIGHTEEN miles due east of Chingleput is the ancient port of Mahavalipore, with rock sculptures said to be the finest in India, called by Europeans "the Seven Pagodas," and rendered famous in English literature by Southey's "Curse of Kehama." Exactly midway is another ancient Hindu place of pilgrimage, called "the Hill of the Sacred Kites." It is one of the most sanctified shrines of Southern India. The main temple is built on the top of a hill about five hundred feet high. Every day between eleven and twelve o'clock two large white birds of the kite species come to the temple on the top of the hill to be fed by a priest specially appointed for that purpose. The wonderful regularity of their attendance every day is a remarkable circumstance connected with this place. The priest, long before the time, ascends the hill, and cooks the meal

for the birds, which consists of rice, sugar, and clarified butter. He takes this to the place called "the Eagle's Rock," and with some songs invokes the holy birds. The two come at the usual hour to the hill, go round the tower of the temple, as if to do homage to the deity, and, alighting on the rock, walk straight to the priest to be fed by him, like domesticated animals. The priest, with reverence, gives the food to be eaten and the clarified butter to be drunk. When the birds are satisfied they go away. Such is the place which Hindus from all parts of India make it a point to visit once at least in their lifetime, and the curious among foreigners once at least during their sojourn in the land.

A few days after the events narrated in the last chapter the annual ten days' festival was celebrated in honour of the presiding deity of this place. It is on occasions of religious festivals held in places where large temples exist that Hindu life is seen at its best. It is there that that life is seen in all its primeval simplicity. We witness thousands of devotees travelling long distances to have a sight of the deity taken in procession, through the well-

watered streets, adorned with flags, evergreens, and other ornamentations, which the pious, in their desire to be of use on such occasions, prepare by way of beautifying the scene. We see thousands, young and old, men and women, actuated by the one single thought of glorifying their Creator, worshipping the deity in manifold forms. We see them fervently pouring forth their prayers in sacred song, those sacred songs being nothing else but forms that found expression when *great* men and gifted poets sang what they thought and felt likewise about their Creator; forms that enchanted generations after generations of men born on the soil and bred in the same modes of religious thinking. After the festival proper various kinds of amusements are in store for the great multitude. They are organised by the pious for the people to enjoy them. To allow those who attend the festivals to enjoy the amusements free is considered to be a work of merit. In every nook and corner will be found crowds fed by the charity of the rich. Sweet drinks are given to the thirsty everywhere. It is on such occasions also that devotees, men great in piety, in learning, and good deeds, attend

the place, and the people throng to hear them discourse on some interesting questions of religion. Acrobats and jugglers are seen in any number; in fact, there is seen there such a strange medley of life—the light side as well as the serious side—that to watch it with interest is in itself an education to man, by which he knows the world and its ways. It gives ample food for reflection to the thoughtful and the observant. In how many ways men yearn after God, and in how many countries under the sun that great power is worshipped in ways peculiar to each of them? The number of offerings made by the people during the festival in this particular place were innumerable, and their nature varied and interesting. They were made in pursuance of vows already made, and they showed the gratitude of the people for all the good vouchsafed to them by that Higher Power, who, they knew, presided over their destinies. That Higher Power assumed that particular form seen in that interesting place. One such vow performed here deserves to be mentioned. It was an interesting performance, one attended with serious danger to

life. It formed the closing part of the great festival.

It is not often that such vows are performed. When there are inter-village dissensions, disputes among members of a particular clan, and unproved charges affecting the chastity of women, hanging fire for many years, this performance of "the striking off of the pole" takes place. If successfully carried out the several contending parties should bury their differences and become reconciled to one another. Accordingly, on this particular occasion, it was decided that, after the close of the performance fixed to take place in this holy place of pilgrimage, the choice of a husband should be left to the daughter of the village laird, especially as the proceedings held a few days ago before the chief of Chingleput made it impossible for her father to choose one of the two suitors, both of whom failed to successfully grapple with the bull. It was decided also that the choice, if made in favour of one of the suitors in preference to the other, should put an end for ever to all bickerings and heart-burnings. The unsuccessful should not only bow to the decision of the girl, but

also join heartily in the subsequent marriage celebrations.

Such were the rules connected with this ceremony. This particular annual festival attracted an unusually large number of pilgrims to this place. No less than twenty thousand persons came there from all parts of the country to witness the feat. It was performed by a member of the weaver caste. The people belonging to this caste are highly sentimental, and the young man who undertook to perform the vow had set his heart upon a fair girl of his class. It so happened that she fell seriously ill, and at one time all hope of recovery was given up. Then the weaver made a vow to the presiding deity of the place, undertaking to perform the difficult feat, should the maiden upon whom he had set his heart recover. She did recover, and preparations went on for some days previously. He had to undergo a course of severe fasting, previous to the performance, and to spend most of his time in religious meditation and prayer. All this was done with a view to the successful carrying out of his difficult task. Failure to accomplish it successfully would be

attributed to want of faith in God and to defect in the due performance of the necessary fasting and prayer, or to unholy thoughts entering the mind of the performer or any one member of his clan.

On the appointed day, at the appointed hour, the young man carried with him a child of about two years to the top of the tower of the temple at the foot of the hill. A strong pole about thirty feet long had already been fixed on the top of the tower and made secure also with ropes reaching to the ground and tied to pegs driven into it. After getting to the top of the tower, about a hundred feet in height, the youth with the child in one of his arms ascended the pole and, fixing his legs to the end, took the child and placed it on one end of another pole, eight feet long; then he slowly and carefully lifted that short pole with the child on the one end and rested the other end on his chin and then stretched his hands to their full length. In this perilous position he was for a minute or two. He was at the height of about one hundred and thirty feet. Eight feet higher was the child on the top of the pole resting on his chin, lifeless as a stone

and steady as a falcon in the air. In the awful abyss below there were about twenty thousand persons with heads uplifted and eyes concentrated upon that little lifeless speck in the air, sending forth their prayers to the Almighty for the successful closing of the performance. Not a lip moved. Not a sound was heard. All was attention, breathless attention. All was religious meditation and deep resignation to the will of the Maker. It was a grand sight, and it looked, as if it were the very presence chamber of the Creator of this vast universe. And one there was in that mass of humanity, the fair maiden for whom this great feat was performed, who silently sent forth her earnest prayer for the end to come soon. And the end came, for the performer struck off the pole, which rested on his chin, and down came the child, which he caught safely in both his hands; and down went the pole, reaching the ground, sending a thrill of horror through all that vast assembly. All this was the work of an instant; and straightway, in the twinkling of an eye, the bold youth slid down on one of the ropes to the ground, with the child in his arm, and stood before the breathless

multitude ; and such shouting for joy and such hearty congratulations never greeted any man at any time in the history of that little interesting place. Thus this young weaver won his bride by his daring courage and skill and his strong faith in God.

But on this very day, after the close of the performance, another vow was made by another person. The various sights which the daughter of the village laird had witnessed during these few days, and the men and manners she had seen, impressed her much. She became imbued with deep religious fervour. The day previous, when she went to the top of the hill to see the kites partaking of the holy food, she noticed a small group of holy men in ashes and religious clothes. One of them was a youth barely seventeen, one on whose beautiful face was pictured a feeling of deep resignation and sorrow. The manner and bearing of the youth affected her much. "Why should this youth," she thought, "blest with such rare beauty, adopt this course of life, giving up the pleasures and the joys of this world? And why should this youth alone, out of the so many thousands in this place, influence me so

mysteriously as to make me give up all thought of this world."

Such were the reflections the girl indulged in when her father asked her to choose her future lord from among the two rich suitors. The girl answered :

"Father, I do not wish to marry. I wish henceforward to devote myself to religion. I have resolved to dedicate my life to the service of God. I beg you will not hinder me from carrying out my purpose."

The father, surprised at this answer, said with some vehemence :

"My dear child, it is not meet that you should be carried away in a moment of religious fervour to come to this decision. It is not right that you, young and inexperienced, should be suddenly thrown on the world, to experience the difficulties and trials and severe penances and the hard rules which such a life of self-denial entails. I advise you to marry, and, in that married state, pursue your intentions by acting up to the ideal you have set up."

"My resolve," said the girl, "is not an uncommon one. Many have acted likewise. For instance, have you not noticed, father, that

small group of holy men who came to the hill yesterday. And that young man among them, what a charm and beauty there is in that life of his! What is it that made him to lead this particular mode of life? Ask and be satisfied."

The father concluded that the girl was inexorable, and left the matter there without pressing it further. Then he made inquiries regarding the group of holy men, the object of their visit to this place, and the reason of the youth among them adopting this career at such an early age. All these made matters rather inconvenient to the pilgrims, who, afraid of some serious troubles, disappeared from the place early on the morning of the next day.

CHAPTER XVI

SOME UNEXPECTED COMPLICATIONS

NEXT day, when the four pilgrims were nearing "the Seven Pagodas," a body of pursuers came upon them to take them back to "the Hill of the Sacred Kites" by force, if necessary, and eventually to Chingleput, to await the final decision of the good chief of that place. A decision upon what? The pilgrims themselves did not know. They knew not what offence they were guilty of. They refused to retrace their steps. There was some altercation. Matters reached a crisis, and the pursuers had almost laid their hands irreverently and uncereemoniously upon all the four men composing that little religious band, when they appealed to the Englishman who, a few days before, had been on a friendly visit to the chief of Chingleput, and whom they met spending his time in viewing the fine rock-cut temples and the various interesting sculptures of the place.

The unfortunate men laid their case unreservedly before Mr Francis Day. His chivalrous nature and generous English heart were moved by their pathetic appeals, and he resolved to take them under his protection. He requested the aggressors to desist from their work and peacefully go back. But they informed Mr Day that they had strict orders to bring back the men, holy men though they might be. When they found him unyielding, they went the length of openly hinting that it was not his business as a foreigner, and as one unacquainted with their manners and customs, to interfere in the matter. Friendly counsel and all manner of persuasions had no effect on the men, who had strict orders to fulfil to the letter the directions given to them. Mr Day had, accordingly, no other alternative than to make arrangements to resist by force, especially when the terror-struck pilgrims sought his help, in the name of the religion he believed in and the God he worshipped. He had recourse to various conciliatory methods, and, after exhausting them all, he most reluctantly prepared himself for the worst, and ordered his men to fall in and

oppose the enemy, who, finding that matters had gone too far, despatched in haste a message to their master, acquainting him of the seriousness of the situation and the necessity for sending immediately a strong body of men to face the unexpected foe. Accordingly, later in the day, a large number of men came running to the place; and Mr Day, finding it impossible to oppose a body greatly superior to his in numbers, ordered his boat at once and rowed away with the pilgrims to the ship, which was waiting at anchor on the sea to carry him to Armagh, one hundred miles north. Soon he set sail, and landed at St Thomé, then a flourishing Portuguese settlement. Here he left the pilgrims in charge of one of the numerous parties going to Chandragiri, where they heard a young saint had arrived and effected remarkable cures of long standing and troublesome diseases that had baffled the skill of the most renowned physicians of the land. The fame of the young saint travelled very quickly, and his doings created a wild sensation throughout the land, and men from all parts were, therefore, hastening to have a glimpse of the great saint

of whom they had heard so much. Mr Day, after selecting a suitable spot, three miles north of St Thomé, for his future fort, went away and safely landed at Armaghham, where the news of the success of his mission was received with the greatest joy.

In the meantime a regular uproar was created by this little incident. The whole country around Chingleput was in a state of ferment. The news of four holy men of the Hindu race being kidnapped by a foreigner was enough to rouse their passions to the highest pitch. What business had he to take them away in his ship? Did he want to take them away to that distant country, thousands of miles away, from which he came? All kinds of wild and reckless rumours were given credence to. Besides this, the Dutch at Pulicat, who had heard of the kind treatment accorded to this representative of the English, took this opportunity to send a respectfully worded communication to the young chief of Chingleput. It narrated what they heard regarding the advantages secured by the English, which intrenched upon the privileges already granted to them. "We earnestly hope," the

letter concluded, "that your highness, whose noble virtues are in the mouth of everyone, who is beloved, nay, venerated by your faithful subjects, and respected by foreigners for the rectitude of your character, for the excellence of your government, and for the zealous guarding of the honour of your men and the religion of your country and of your fathers, will not grant privileges to the English which may prove detrimental to our interests. The English are, like ourselves, merchants trading for the benefit of their masters at home. We claim equality of treatment and nothing more." This communication was sent to Chennapa through their Hindu interpreter, in whose capacity for work of this kind they had the highest confidence.

When Chennapa, who had been absent from Chingleput for a considerable period, returned, he was sorely grieved to find everything in confusion. The people he found in a highly excited condition. The complaints were loud and numerous against the Englishman whom he had treated so kindly. Chennapa was informed that Mr Day had kidnapped four of their countrymen and carried them away

to his ship. Worse than that, those four men were holy pilgrims who went about the country visiting sacred shrines. The Hindu interpreter of the Dutch settlement at Pulicat also delivered his message, which was in effect a complaint against that same Englishman against whom his people were loudly calling for a severe retribution. The men requested him to lead them against the English at Armaghham to relieve their unfortunate countrymen from their perilous position. They asked him to carry fire and sword to exterminate them altogether. Again the friendly Dutch had some imaginary grievances against some fancied advantages granted to the English. Chennapa thought of his friend, guide, and philosopher—the sage of Chingleput—at this juncture. To him he went, and laid the whole matter before him. The old man replied :

“Wait and see, my son. Have patience. Hear what the other side has to say. At present we have not before us the Englishman’s version of the incident. It may be that this action of his is meant for good to you. It may be that a slight incident, trivial

in itself, has been magnified into a grave political error. It may be that in the end, when the truth becomes known, it will turn out to be an action which you cannot but approve. Do not be led away, therefore, by the clamour of your people."

"Still another important matter there is, my revered master, which has suddenly sprung up," said Chennapa in rather a despondent tone. "The Dutch at Pulicat are complaining of some imaginary benefits I am supposed to have conferred upon the English. A gentleman belonging to our community, and employed by them as their interpreter, is come here to treat with me. I told Mr Day, who came to me a short time ago, that I would favourably consider the request for a strip of land for the building of a fort. This is what took place."

"There, you see," said the sage, "how matters were represented to the Dutch. You know that the representations made to them are false. It may be that the representations now being made to your people regarding the taking away by the Englishman of four of our countrymen will similarly turn out to be false if we wait and patiently know the

whole affair. When two nations come here to trade, differences and heart-burnings will naturally exist. You must not mind them. You should be impartial and be just to both. Of course, we know the Dutch. They have been here for some time. They are a proud nation. As for the English, I see from the reports I hear of the Englishman who visited your court recently, about his proud bearing and dignified demeanour, that they are proud too, and that he belongs to a nation whose pride and manliness and courage and chivalry will prevent them from mingling freely with us who possess other virtues no less important. Dogged stubbornness, endurance, an intense desire to help the weak against the strong, and to grant equality of political rights to those who are not as physically great as themselves, these masculine virtues usually characterise such nations. On the other hand, we possess the softer virtues of humility, mildness, forbearance, kindness, and mercy to all living things on earth. These virtues of a sentimental kind characterise our race. We have an individuality and an exclusiveness, the result, of course, of our deep religious

convictions, which preclude us from commingling with other races. It would be impossible, therefore, for the Hindu and the English to be merged into each other and to give birth to quite a new race, with none of their virtues, but with the vices of both. There is no possibility of the fusion of two such races. I would, therefore, advise you to welcome the English with open arms, and to do all that lies in your power to encourage and assist the coming into India of nations that possess what I call physical virtues, and not the nations that will soon get absorbed into our communities. We want men like the English, who, I think, possess potentialities for good, to wake us from our sleep and to rouse our latent energies, that we may imitate their virtues and cultivate them for our good."

"Great Teacher," said the young chief, "to me the holy calling, which you so peacefully pursue, has charms and attractions so great and deep that I often think of giving up my sphere of life and retiring to a peaceful place to spend the rest of my days there. The experience I gained by the few visits I made

to Chandragiri in the garb of a holy man, in search of Padmini, has made that calling acceptable to me and congenial to my nature. There I did good to many. I relieved the sick and gladdened their hearts. This has so gladdened me that I find my real salvation in it. I can better serve God by taking up this work than by ruling a petty state, or even an ancient kingdom. I want your permission to adopt this course of life, and your blessing."

"You are sadly mistaken," retorted the old man, sorrowfully. "Each man has his appointed duty to perform in this life, and he can so do it as to find salvation in it. It may be one of the ordinary everyday concerns of human life that he is engaged in. By his force of character, by honesty and truth, he can import into it a higher and a religious idea, and pursue it accordingly. This is the great secret of our religion. We live, move, and have our being in religion. Religion permeates the everyday life of the Hindu. The saint political is as good as the saint religious. You know our saying, that ten handfuls of rice are enough to satisfy the ordinary cravings of hunger, and

you know, also, that there are many hundreds, if not thousands, even in your little petty state, who could afford to have no more than five handfuls each for their daily meal ; and if you, as their ruler, take compassion on them and abolish some tax or lighten the burden of your people by reducing another tax, or if you forego some of your own luxuries or reduce the emoluments—to a slight extent—of your highly-paid officers and thereby add one more handful of rice to each of those half-starving men, there you love God better, you serve him more eloquently, than all the sages and the religious preceptors who preach on the virtue of charity and the religious merit attained by feeding starving mouths. By prayer regularly morning and evening you glorify God. But you glorify God more worthily by assisting the poor, lightening their heavy burdens. You once went to the help of a poor woman against your own preceptor. Is that not a greater act of merit than going to temples to offer our devotions or walking long distances to hear a religious preceptor discoursing on religion ? Acts like these, for the good of humanity, you can do in greater number as a ruler of men .

than as a man of religion. Every man has his appointed work, as you have yours, and if that is done with a high ideal set before him he is sure to attain happiness. True happiness is surely not in rich food, exquisite music, in various kinds of luxuries possessed in abundance, but it is in the inward satisfaction you feel when you take leave of this world that you have done your duty well—your duty to man, beast, and bird—and left the world, your country, or your little village, or even your own little household, better than when you first entered life as a human being. Think of these things deeply, and do what lies in your power, as a ruler of men, in the direction I have indicated. Do not be carried away by the comparative ease and charm of this life of mine, the quietness and the rest it gives, and the privacy it secures from the din of a noisy world.”

Chennapa then left the old man, with his blessings, better equipped to bear his troubles and difficulties.

CHAPTER XVII

VALLABHA—SAINT AND PRINCE

AFTER his visit to the old sage, Chennapa pacified his subjects by assuring them of his earnest desire to inquire fully into the charge brought against Mr Day. He also assured the Hindu messenger from Pulicat that nothing had occurred in his relations with the English to mar the friendly feeling existing between him and the Dutch.

He had a more important matter occupying his thoughts than either of the above two incidents. He was longing to meet his Padmini. The three visits he had already made to Chandragiri had proved fruitless. He had created a tremendous sensation there by the efficacy of his medicines. He had come in contact with all sorts of men. When the sick who had been relieved by his medicines pressed him to accept presents he refused to take them, consistently with his character as a holy man. Still they pressed him, with

hearts full of gratitude, to state what service he expected of them in return for all the good done by him. He gave to one and all this reply: "There will come a day when, at the foot of the hill yonder, I will hold a great feast. I want your presence then to offer our devotions to the Lord. You will all know the exact day of the feast, for on the day • previous, at lamp-lighting time, there will be a huge light lighted up at the top of that hill to warn everyone of the coming feast. Watch, therefore, every evening, and when you find the light hasten the next morning to the foot of the hill." Throughout all the three previous visits he had neither found his Padmini nor acquired information regarding her whereabouts. He had to be careful and circumspect in his inquiries, which, so far, had proved unsuccessful. After the sensation and the passion of the hour had subsided a little in his little state, Chennapa started again for Chandragiri as a holy saint. He assumed the name of Vallabha. This time when Saint Vallabha reached Chandragiri an eager crowd, larger than on the three previous occasions, was waiting to receive him. Sick men, in scores and hundreds,

from distant parts, had come there. The fame of the great healer spread far and wide.

One day during this stay of the saint, when the people near him were having their mid-day siesta on the open meadows around his humble hut at the outskirts of the town, a youth of barely seventeen summers, with the loose habit of one who had renounced the world, approached the saint, taking advantage of his being alone in his hut. The youth approached him and, kneeling, whispered in low tones: "My lord! I am no other than Padmini, for whom you ran away. But yesterday I noticed my name tattooed on your arm, and have been anxiously waiting for an opportunity to make myself known to you. This holy calling I assumed, and wandered about the country to find you out. When I was about to start for Chingleput to meet you the daughter of a village laird fell in love with me, having met me at the 'Eagle's Rock' in 'the Hill of the Sacred Kites.' She proposed to marry me and follow me in my wanderings as a holy pilgrim. I refused. I heard that plans were laid to take me away by force and marry me to her. I ran with my men to 'the Seven Pagodas'; the

pursuers came upon us to take us away, but the good Englishman's interposition saved us. I was saved from a most difficult situation ; for, if I had been carried away and married to the daughter of the laird against my will, without a knowledge of my real character, what would have been the result ?" At this juncture Padmini saw a small party, consisting of a sick man and three or four of his relations, approaching the saint ; then hastily whispering : " Now is the time to throw off the mask ; lose no time," she withdrew.

Immediately Vallabha secretly ordered his attendants, who were among the crowd like strangers unconnected with him, to ascend the hill and set fire to the large quantity of cotton soaked in oil stored in a huge cauldron set up at the top of the hill. In the evening, after the sun had set and darkness set in, the whole town noticed the big light on the hill. The inhabitants of Chandragiri, who during many anxious days had been watching at lamp-lighting time to see the much-wished-for light, were rejoiced to find it at last. They were busy the whole night collecting the necessaries for a grand feast ; and before dawn next day about

ten thousand souls were assembled to meet their beloved saint, the great Vallabhaswami. The people were merry everywhere with feasting.

Then Vallabha stood in his hermit's garb, his long orange-coloured gown reaching his knees, and addressed the men in deep, loud tones: "Good men! My sons! My children! Yes, my sons and children you are. Like the sheep without the shepherd you were these long years, because he had to run away, leaving you to your fate. I suffered many ills, underwent many trials and difficulties. The cup of misery and woe was full to overflowing. I led the life of a humble villager. I was brought up by kind parents who adopted me. Subsequently I was brought to serve under your present ruler. Him I served faithfully. I brought, at the risk of my life, the great diamond for which he panted so hard. I wrestled with the champion wrestler of the north. I won the love of Padmini. Here is the necklace of pearls with the diamond pendant which she threw on me and which I safely preserved to prove to her, when comes the time, that I am no other than Chennapa. Thereafter, I ran away from the fury of your

ruler, and was installed as the chief of Chingleput. I came here before to find her, but now only—yesterday—we met.”

When he finished his speech the whole audience was dumfounded. It was a surprise to the people to find that the great Saint Vallabha was no other than their own Chennapa who some time ago had disappeared from their town. Before they had time to recover their senses a young pilgrim stepped in and threw off the long gown, and, lo ! there was revealed not a youth but a maiden of queenly beauty. Padmini related to the wondering audience how she had escaped from Chandragiri, how she had wandered and toiled hard to find out Chennapa, how at “the Hill of the Sacred Kites” she was brought into serious difficulties, and how the good Englishman saved her honour. This was surprise upon surprise. The people did not know what to say. Not a lip moved ; not a voice was heard : there was deep silence. They did not believe what they saw. They thought they were in some enchanter’s place, who, by the magic of his wand, had brought about this remarkable, sudden transformation. The

Brahmins there immediately raised the sacrificial fire, to unite Chennapa and Padmini in holy wedlock. The chief among them, the aged Brahmin priest, was busy preparing for the ceremonies when Chennapa, interrupting him, said in a loud voice—with tears that came streaming down his eyes: his whole frame shook as he spoke, and the whole assembly, now roused to the highest pitch, gave ear in silence.—“My children, and my faithful subjects ! your Chennapa, standing before you, the hero of your popular songs and your thousand ballads ; Chennapa, who won the love of the fairest maiden in your land, is no other than the only surviving son of your late king Venkataroya, who sent me away in a bundle of clothes by his washerman at that dark hour when he, my blessed father, and the rest of our family, died by the order of your present ruler.”

When he said this he wept aloud, and the thousands collected there also wept like children. Then he asked the old priest, who had also officiated at the marriage of his father and mother years ago, to untie the silk kerchief tied to his arm. The knot was un-

tied, the silk kerchief was taken off, and there were found within, the great ruby ring, the emblem of the Vijianagar royalty, and a palm leaf. These he saw for the first time since his father had secured them to his arm,—after a lapse of nearly nine years. He kissed the ring. He placed it on his eyes several times. The old priest took the palm leaf. He read aloud: “This is my second son, Srirungaroya, and the ruby ring on his person is the great ruby of our household. When the time comes, let no one doubt the one nor the other. This is written with my own hand, Venkataroya.”

This surprise, the last of the three, and the most astounding of all, formed the close of this crowded memorable hour.

The women, in the exuberance of their joy, went round the sacrificial fire, singing the following song:—

THE BRIDAL SONG OF TRUTH AND LOVE

“Now fan the fire, now feed the flame,
The slumb’ring fire, the dying flame,
The fire of Truth, the flame of Love,
For Truth to spread, for Love to bind,
For sacred Truth to chasten man,
For noble Love to sweeten life,

To make a heaven of our home,
To make a paradise of Ind.

Around this sacred fire of Truth,
Around this flame of Love, go we,
To chant a hymn of praise to Him,
To Him, who gave us Truth and Love,
Him, who gave back our Rungaroy,
Him, who sent here our Padmini dear,
To make a heaven of our home,
To make a paradise of Ind.

And Truth and Love—Oh! these were
quenched

When our dear prince left this our land,
When our dear Padmini fled the fort.
But fan again the slumb'ring fire,
And feed again the dying flame,
For they have come again to us,
To make a heaven of our home,
To make a paradise of Ind.

No Heav'n above, no Hell below;
So fan the fire of Truth to spread,
So feed the flame of Love to bind,
To make a heaven of our earth.
Where Truth and Love are not, sure there
Is Hell, but where Truth chastens life
Where noble Love doth brighten home,
There is true heav'n, there is true heav'n."

So ran the bridal song of *Truth and Love*
when Padmini and Srirungaroya were united
under such romantic circumstances. Then
said the prince: "Now let us thank God for

uniting us, for uniting me with my betrothed and my people, and, before we go to get back my throne, let us call His name in veneration, let us thank Him with one unanimous voice." Straightway the whole assembly of nearly ten thousand souls uttered the great name of *Hari Narayana*, which shook the hills.

"Once more," he said, "let us utter that sacred name in tones stronger and louder."

Immediately there went forth from ten thousand throats the great name of God, which was heard for miles around, and which resounded through the hills. Soon the able-bodied men followed their long-absent prince, to strike at once; and in one moment of religious fervour the great deed was done. The lost kingdom was gained, and the usurper fled from the country.

The rest is soon told. Srirangaroya regained the throne of his fathers, agreeably to the wish of his father, who advised his son: "Shed not even a single drop of blood. If it should happen that invincible armies range under your banner, and that success will assuredly be yours, lead them not against the usurper, wade not through blood to the throne."

Saluva left Chandragiri that very day. He gave up the throne as quickly as when he came by it. He ran away to the sacred hill of Tripati, where, it is believed, he perished; thus fulfilling the prophecy of the young minstrel who died at his hands, and who, in his last moments, pronounced this curse:

“Thy dart hath pierced my heart, but hearken to the
darts,
From this my bleeding tongue, that shall consume thy race,
Of whom none shall this throne of high renown defile,
None to point where thy body crumbled to the dust.”

The coronation took place, in due time, at the historical palace of Chandragiri. The ruby ring was put on the king's finger. The necklace of pearls with the diamond pendant glittered on the queen's person. There were joy and merriment everywhere. The necessary arrangements were made for the proper administration of Chingleput during the young chief's minority. The plot of land for building Fort St George was granted to Mr Day on the 1st of March 1639.* This first act of

* The English offered to name the town that arose around the fort after the king and call it Srirungaroyapatam. But he preferred it to be called after his former name. Hence the name Chennapatam, by which Madras is called at the present day by the Indians.

the king was a source of immense pleasure not only to the queen, who presented to the Englishman, in gratitude for the noble service rendered to her, the diamond of the Valley of the Adamant, which glittered in her necklace of pearls, but to the king also, who found this prophecy recorded in the archives of the palace at Chandragiri, the prophecy uttered by a princess of the house before she ascended the funeral pyre after the great battle of Talikota :

“I see a cloud, now looming yonder there,
No bigger than the hand of man, that shall
Expand and rain and water to purge all
The land of th’ innocent blood shed on it,
For mother India’s cup of woe is full,
And but three decades more,—there will come from
The far-off ends of this vast globe of ours, —
A little island planted in the sea,—
A handful of a noble race to trade,
And shall from thee ask for a plot of land,
And they shall prosper for their valour and
Shall be exalted for their righteousness.
They shall befriend the helpless and the poor,
And like the streams that seek the ocean broad,
The chickens that run to their mother’s wings,
The maidens helpless and forlorn, that court
The succour of the chivalrous and the brave,
The orphans poor, the bounty of the kind,
All men of Ind, all races and all creeds

Shall to their banner flock, to live in peace
And amity; the tiger and the lamb
Their thirst shall quench both from the self-same
brook.

The giant brute before the weakly sage
Shall bow, and men shall fear to even gaze
Upon the maidens that go forth alone,
Adorned with naught but chastity, and from
All lands the wisest shall revere our faith.
He that desires our homes to plunder and
Sully the honour of our women, him
Punishment terrible shall sure await.
Three hundred years more and the little plot
Of land thou gavest shall grow and expand
Into an empire huge, unwritten yet
On hist'ry's page, and shall surpass the dreams
Of warriors bold in times of old, and like
The creepers that, entwined around the oak,
Luxuriant grow, safe from the storms that blow,
And flowers give forth to beautify the scene,
Her sons shall everlasting peace enjoy,
And blessings, hitherto unknown to man—
The grandest scene for God to ever cast
His loving eyes upon, and for the world
Of man to wonder at. . . ."

Thus was laid the foundation of a great
empire. The rest is history.

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

LIFE IN AN INDIAN VILLAGE

With an INTRODUCTION by the Right Hon. Sir M. E. GRANT DUFF, G.C.S.I.

“Mr Ramakrishna takes a typical village in the Madras Presidency, ‘the most Indian part of India,’ and shows us in half-a-dozen lucid chapters that the wants of the villagers are all material—wells, roads, better breeds of cattle, and so on—and that they do not, and will not for a long time, care one cash for anything which happens, or which might be made to happen, in the great outer world beyond their palm groves and rice fields. There is nothing political in this pleasant little book, we are pleased to say, although we have drawn this political moral from it. It is a truthfully written account of native life in one of those 55,000 villages which dot the great district—a tract much larger than the British Isles—the daily existence of whose peaceful, and not altogether unhappy, population it is intended to illustrate; and it can be dipped into, or read through, with equal satisfaction and advantage.”—*Daily Telegraph*.

“‘Life in an Indian Village’ is an amusing and clear portrayal of the manners and customs of the inhabitants of a village in the Madras Presidency. The author first depicts his little community, and then proceeds to describe the avocations of all the leading personages. As Kelambakam may be taken as a type of thousands of such villages, the book will be found particularly interesting to those who are likely to be brought into contact with the natives of India. Sir M. E. Grant Duff has written an introduction, in which he suggests how the simple villagers can be benefited by their European neighbours.”—*Morning Post*.

“It is not an easy thing to acquire a clear conception of a life and a civilization other in every respect to our own, and it may be reasonably questioned if one Englishman in a thousand has more than a very vague idea of what life in an Indian village is like. Here is a pleasant and graphic little volume. He may acquire that knowledge from the sketches of an Indian gentleman who knows the subject through and through, and has, more-

over, so much of European culture that he is able to present the facts in a form that will not seem strange or incredible."—*Birmingham Post*

TALES OF IND

With an INTRODUCTION by the Hon. the Rev. W. MILLER, LL.D., C.I.E.

"They are interesting and remarkable."—LORD TENNYSON.

"Very rarely does any one obtain so good a knowledge of a foreign tongue as to be able to write such good verse in it as you have done."—The Right Honourable Sir M. E. GRANT DUFF, G.C.S.I.

"I have read your poems not only with great pleasure, but with admiration for the mastery of English rhythm which you have attained. Your versification is smooth and melodious, and your command of poetical diction remarkable, especially in one to whom English is not a mother tongue."—The Right Honourable JAMES BRYCE, D.C.L.

"'Tales of Ind' is a decidedly interesting little book. Mr Ramakrishna writes excellent English. He has, what is rare among good poets, the art of telling a story. These tales, admirable material in themselves, are told with great simplicity, clearness, and natural feeling."—*Saturday Review*.

"They are simple tales, told in English verse, which is characterised by a purity and a simplicity that are very noteworthy in an Indian writer, and which show considerable acquaintance of the English language, especially of Tennyson's writings. Indeed, of them all is true what was said of the first poem, not only according to the *Christian College Magazine*, that some forms of expression seem coined in the mint of Tennyson, but according to the *Statesman and Friend of India*, that where the versification is best, it has a ring of Tennyson."—*Madras Times*.

